

LIFE ON THE ROCKS: ENVIRONMENTAL  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROCK CRAWLERS,  
A WESTERN AMERICAN RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**LIFE ON THE ROCKS: ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROCK  
CRAWLERS, A WESTERN AMERICAN RECREATIONAL COMMUNITY**

by

J. David Neal

A thesis submitted to the  
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## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary American west many communities vie for (and share) public lands. This text studies one of these groups, Rock Crawlers, who are automotive enthusiasts that (re)construct their 4-wheel drive vehicles to pilot them over trails winding through these spaces. They enter these lands to enjoy their beauty, push their driving skills in an arduous terrain, and to seek refuge from negative attributes they believe are inherent to the urban milieu. These places--dubbed the "outback"--are socially created, carved from their surrounding non-urban environment through the existence of mentally held "maps." These maps, superimposed over the terrain like a blanket, are comprised of special outback locations such as challenges, aberrations in the terrain, or culturally-relevant historical sites.

This text studies how these values are reflected through the form of the 4x4s used to venture into these ideologically laden outback places. Interaction with the landscape on a personal level engenders morphological reconfigurations in the vehicles, as drivers make them compatible with the harsh environments where they are used. Even aesthetic modifications--paint, chrome and accessories--to the 4x4s hinge on values concerning the nature and significance of the outback.

Places so imbued with meaning necessitate special activities. This is

because they are liminal, or Other than the locations of normal daily life. Although outback lands are entered for ritual and recreation, they maintain their special nature through adhesion to strictly maintained and performed rules of "off-road etiquette."

As such, outback activities take on ritual status; they become more than play or diversion; they become a metaphor for life, showing participants what it means to be productive members of one's family, social group, or society.

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## **PREFACE**

In this work I attempt to provide a focused interpretive analysis of the perceptions the rock crawling community concerning their physical environment. My hypothesis is that traditional communally-held notions concerning non-urban landscapes are revealed through the material culture and social events (such as ritual, spectacle, and play) this automotive-based recreational group employs to interact with these places. Studying these cultural landscapes through an approach which is purposefully eclectic and interdisciplinary in its theoretical scope, I show that the values and characteristics believed to exist in the desert and mountain terrains of the American West are revealed through modification and re-engineering of the off-road vehicles Rock Crawling enthusiasts use to access these places.

Traditionally conditioned perceptions of these physical environments are further revealed and bolstered through the structure of the group's social activities which take place within these culturally bounded locations. But before an in-depth discussion of the rock crawling community can continue, background data concerning this group, and myself as an ethnographer, is needed to provide a contextual framework for readers.

## **A THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF MY HISTORY AND RESEARCH WITH THE ROCK CRAWLING COMMUNITY**

A yellow-orange sun hangs high in the sky above a rock-strewn, ledge-filled, trail meandering through a southwestern American desert dotted with strangely-shaped rock formations. Fifteen Jeep-style vehicles,<sup>1</sup> sitting tall above fat, heavily-treaded tires, slowly pull up to a five foot tall crumbling-rock ledge. Passengers get out of their 4x4s as the first vehicle in the line is negotiated into a position that enables it to climb straight-up the ledge. People holler jokes and supportive comments as the vehicle becomes nearly vertical. Its front tires slowly spin on the shifting rock at the top of the incline, searching for a grip. Finally the vehicle finds traction and heaves up and over the ledge. The driver of the next vehicle starts its motor and approaches the small precipice. This process is repeated until each vehicle climbs the ledge. Then the group moves on.

The above scene is a common event on what is called a trail ride. Participants call themselves "Rock Crawlers." This community is mostly comprised of urban middle-class individuals, primarily male, who enjoy exploring the desert and mountain areas of the American West. They venture into these areas as a way to see beautiful country, escape the metropolitan world, and challenge their driving skills. The types of trails they frequent are not simple graded dirt roads. They have been described by group members as:

Rocks. Boulders. Forty-degree inclines.....Much of the time, trail

---

<sup>1</sup> This includes Broncos, Samurais, Landcruisers, and other short wheelbase 4x4's.

ground varies and is loose. Inclines and off-camber trails are very common. Water crossings are also frequent obstacles during rockcrawling. (Quinnell, 1997b, 28)

4x4 vehicles play an important part in this community. They are the means for accessing and enjoying the places to which trails lead. As might be expected, for Rock Crawlers to complete a trail experience, more than a stock 4-wheel drive is required. The 4x4s these folks drive are heavily modified, rebuilt to perform in arduous, and often extreme, circumstances. There is a tradition concerning the creation of these vehicles, and builders conform to communally-based notions of acceptable vehicle forms.

The areas that are accessed by the trails are called the "outback." The outback is more than a place of play or diversion. It is also a location for the community to meet, socialize, and to propagate the rules regarding the proper "etiquette" for outback behavior. These spaces are also locations for ritualized behavior. As such, the outback is a zone for cultural production.

## **MY HISTORY WITH THE ROCK CRAWLING COMMUNITY**

I first became acquainted with 4-wheeling, and its many sub-groups, during the early eighties. I had recently moved to Provo, Utah, from my home in Sudbury, Massachusetts—about thirty miles west of Boston. I had relocated to attend Brigham Young University. Along with my new university lifestyle came new friends. At this time I met and befriended Quinn Mortensen, an avid off-roader. His interest in fixing-

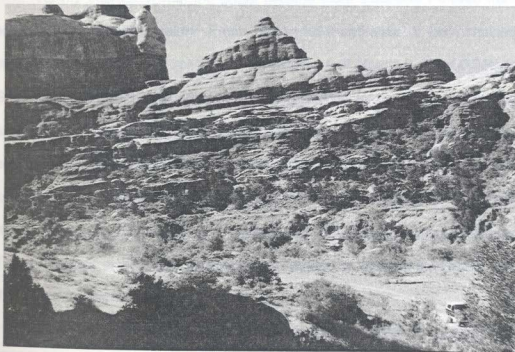
up his current vehicle, a 1978 Ford Bronco, to explore the back country of central Utah intrigued me.

Not long after meeting Quinn, I began searching for a 4x4 of my own. Following the purchase of my first 4-wheel drive in 1986—a 1971 Ford Bronco—the motor-sport became my passion. Here was a way to challenge my driving skills while in beautiful and difficult terrain. These challenging drives plunged me deep into the back country of Utah. These were places that I already liked to go as a hiking, biking, and camping enthusiast. I also learned that off-roading is not a solitary sport. Rather, it is conducive to social interaction, as most accomplished drivers rarely go alone. The dangers to both person and 4x4 spur serious drivers to venture onto difficult trails in groups.

Searching for others with whom to go off-road, I quickly discovered that there are myriad off-road communities, each centering around different gestalts of the landscape, driving styles, and social expectations. Each group creates vehicles to suit its purposes. Learning of these different groups led me to hunt for the one that best suited my interests; I gravitated to the “rock crawling” community. Here was a society who drove their vehicles on trails that took them into some of the most beautiful and solitary territory in Utah (and other states). Many of the trails venturing into these locations are difficult enough that people on foot can hardly walk over them. The vehicles—built specifically to accomplish these driving feats—were modified to radical extents that held me in awe (fig: P.1). Such explorations are a way of spending time in the company of family and friends, within social and ecological dynamics which differ from those of the urban centers where most



**FIG: P.1** Stock 4x4s do not last long in such rugged terrain. Jim Cole's Jeep, heavily modified for this physical environment, handles the trail with relative ease. (Courtesy Jim Cole)



**FIG: P.2** Vehicles are dwarfed as they drive below the painted and sculpted cliffs lining Salt Creek trail.

participants live.

I quickly fell in love with the desertescapes of southern Utah (fig: P.2). When attending rock crawling events in the painted deserts of this region--locations that look like scenery from a Roadrunner and Coyote cartoon--I was amazed at places that contrasted so much with my Massachusetts home-ground. New England is lush and green; places are hedged-in, fecund with flora and fauna. The desert, by way of contrast, seemed at first to be expansive and lifeless. Yet, deeper inspection reveals a wealth of color and life: vibrant oranges, yellows, ochres, and browns swirl through the stone formations. Plant and animal life existed everywhere, I just had to look more closely.<sup>2</sup>

As my interaction with the group became more extensive I moved from amateur to professional realms. From 1989 to 1994, and again in 1997, I helped others construct their own vehicles as an employee of *Mountain West Off-Road Supply Inc.* This shop specializes in modifying vehicles for the rigorous demands of this sport. These modifications include adding new suspensions, tires, wheels, and a host of "bolt-on" additions, like bumpers, lights, and chrome accessories. My knowledge and ability did not occur overnight: I spent considerable time driving off-road, and years studying suspension characteristics, drive trains, and body designs. This is a process that all Rock Crawlers must undergo--at least for the vehicle type that they drive--to be competent.

As a local Rock Crawler, I was contacted in the early 1990's by several other

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<sup>2</sup> David W. Teague notes that those not raised in desert climates often must cultivate or acquire a desert aesthetic (91-144).

members of the community who wanted to form a family-oriented rock crawling club. Their goal was to gather a community of families that could enjoy 4-wheeling as a group. They wanted to ensure that the group was comprised of responsible folk that would help prove that Rock Crawling is neither wild youngsters, nor harmful to the landscape. The group wanted to actively popularize images of off-roading that are different than the negative ones the general population often sees.

Thus, I became a founding/charter member of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*, a group that are now known as some of the "best equipped 4-wheelers in Utah" (comment, 1996 *Jeep Safar*). Learning of my background in art, members of the club asked me to design the club logo that would appear on the members' vehicles, club attire, and club letterhead. As an active member, I voted on club policy regarding driving habits, membership requirements, and all other club business. I regularly attended the monthly meetings. I also lead the club's first official trail ride; this excursion traversed the *Poison Spider Mesa* trail, in southern Utah, during the Summer of 1993.

I spent considerable time associating with the local "big dogs." A "big dog" is what Rock Crawlers call individuals recognized as leaders within the community. This leadership comes as a result of superior driving skill, quality vehicle modification practices, or years of exemplary experience within the group (fig: P.3). These individuals are often the best teachers because of their extensive seasoning. This multifaceted learning process is ongoing; otherwise, I would lose touch with quickly



**FIG: P.3** Jim Cole can be called a “big dog” because he regularly negotiates tough obstacles like this six-foot ledge, has years of experience exploring arduous trails, and uses a competent driving style, (Courtesy Jim Cole) changing modification procedures.<sup>3</sup> As a community member I have an in-depth knowledge of life within Rock Crawling culture; this knowledge informs my research.

I have spent extensive time as a participant-observer, having been a member of at least twenty organized trail rides throughout central and southern Utah between 1989 and 1996. I have participated in an even greater number of informal trail explorations since I started 4-wheeling in the mid-eighties. In the Fall of 1990, I led a group of writers for an international off-road magazine on a trail ride through the mountains of central-Utah. I have been a regular participant at the *Moab Easter*

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<sup>3</sup> During the three years that I lived in St. John's, Newfoundland, I had to study hard to keep up with this rapidly changing body of knowledge. This study was accomplished by reading 4x4 magazines and talking to friends back in Utah. My 1975 Ford Bronco, a well-modified eye-catcher in 1994, is now technically obsolete in 1998.





**FIG: P.4** Victor Mokler begins to cross the *Golden Crack* in his Jeep CJ-7 during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. (Courtesy Victor Mokler.)



**FIG: P.5** Victor continues across the *Golden Crack*. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)

*Jeep Safari*—rock crawling culture's premier festival—for four years (1992-1994, 1998) (figs: P.4, P.5). In 1996 I attended the event purely as an ethnographer; my 1975 Bronco was garaged in St. John's, Newfoundland.

As a consultant at *Mountain West Off-Road Supply Inc.*, I have associated with thousands of rock crawling enthusiasts from all over the mountain-west. This interaction afforded me keen insight into the values and beliefs motivating many individuals within the community. I have been able to see general vehicle construction trends (on a macro scale) as I helped individuals from Utah, Idaho, Colorado, Wyoming, and other western states prepare their rigs for the rigors of heavy trail riding. Yet I also frequently interacted on a personal (micro) basis with store regulars and *Lone Peak* club members. I lent a hand in the creation of many 4x4s, several of which appear in the following pages. I know the builders of most of these vehicles, and the beliefs that have motivated their construction efforts. I have even spent weekend time with a wrench under some of these rigs.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY

As an ethnographer, I feel that it is important to move beyond my personal enjoyment of rock crawling so this research will raise issues which transcend the western American rock crawling culture. Such efforts will help readers not connected with this group to contemplate issues and cultural dynamics which may affect *their own* lives or scholastic pursuits. And hopefully Rock Crawlers who read

this will find themselves thinking critically about their own culture.

Because the following project concerns Rock Crawlers and their relationship to the landscapes they explore, issues such as the separation and creation of special cultural places (mentally or physically) from their surrounding spaces are key issues. How this spatial separation is achieved, and what affect this process—and its accompanying locations of “cultural reproduction”—has upon a community, are unifying themes (Low, 67).

This theme is influenced by the work of several scholars who are conducting studies concerning the perception of place. Foremost in such research is Yi-Fu Tuan. His works, such as *Topophilia* and *Space and Place*, focus on experiential and cultural approaches to “place” and are a mainstay for this work. His “Language and the Making of Place” provided a starting point for investigating cultural locations as rhetorically constructed zones. I expanded these concepts with the findings of Keith Basso. His publications (1983, 1988, 1996) concerning language use, and its interconnectedness to the physical environment, which grew out of research with a group of Apache Indians, has been a bench mark in my quest to understand Rock Crawlers' mentally held back country maps.

Studying cognitive maps simply cannot be done without Kent C. Ryden's *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*. This study, concerning the affect a regional environment has upon the creative aspects of a community, thoroughly reconfigured my understanding of the importance of both region and place to folk groups. I combined ideas gained from Ryden with those of Jay Appleton (1990, 1996). Appleton's “prospect-refuge” theory furthered my understanding of the physical

environment as a location for several forms of escape.

This work also investigates the assumption tacitly held among Rock Crawlers that outback locations are landscapes apart—or Other—from those in which they live their normal lives. Not only does this assumption influence activities occurring in these places, but the technology used to access them. The notion that a physical environment can profoundly affect the form of material culture created within its bounds is a cornerstone to this study. My approach to this topic has been influenced most powerfully by the scholarship of Henry Glassie, Mary Hufford, Michael Owen Jones, and Gerald L. Pocius. Glassie has published studies concerning object construction and form which are invaluable. His *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* is a direct influence upon the approach and form that I chose for chapter 4 of this work, "Performance and Design in Rock Crawler Morphology." Yet, other publications by him, such as "Folk Art" and "Studying Material Culture Today," have equally affected my approach to material manifestations of culture.

Mary Hufford's studies concerning the material interaction between people and their environment in the Pinelands area of New Jersey were also of pivotal importance to this research (1985, 1986, 1990, 1992). Chapter 3 of this work, "Outback Terrain and Vehicle Form," was directly influenced by her publication "One Reason God Made Trees: The Form and Ecology of the Barnegat Bay Sneekbox."

Michael Owen Jones and Gerald Pocius also had impact upon this work. Jones' publications (1980, 1989, 1993) furthered my concepts regarding the process by which artisans shape and form their objects. *Craftsman of the Cumberlands* is a powerful study which initiated me into an understanding of the psychological

ramifications of the creative act. Gerald Pocius' *A Place to Belong* influences how I approach the notion of cultural places, and how these cultural tenets affect artistic expression.

This research also investigates the affect of a physical environment upon forms of ritual and play. These performative dynamics are not unique to this group of off-roaders. They can, for instance, be found influencing objects other than 4x4s, such as homes. And the notion that ritual times and places become Other than a group's normal world is commonly believed to occur during such liminal activities.

My approach to ritual and play has been primarily affected by several scholars. Roger Caillois (1961) and his predecessor, Johan Huizinga (1955), have both affected my understanding of the play dynamic. Their attempts to quantify and dissect play as a serious cultural expression are imperative to an understanding of play as a valid form of cultural production and exhibition. Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play, Notes on A Balinese Cockfight," which focuses upon play as a means for performing and reifying the values of a culture, is equally important to my conceptualization of play.

I was introduced to John Bale's work (1994) during the writing phase of my research. His unique approach to the relationship between myth and contemporary sportscapes, and to the assertion that sportscapes are cultural projections which affect life outside the sports sphere, forced me to reevaluate and rewrite entire portions of my work.

Victor Turner's research concerning liminality is ubiquitous to ethnographic studies of ritual world wide. I have been most influenced by a short comparative

work on myth, ritual, and drama (1991). Seeing ritual as a phenomenon that expands into areas of life that may not be perceived as "ritualistic" or even culturally important is important to my approach to the back country milieu as a site of cultural reproduction.

Understanding that I conducted this research while thinking of its applicability to other avenues of study is crucial. And readers must follow along with this in mind. For, unless a work stimulates us to reevaluate ourselves, our folk groups, and our research, it is but little use. Readers should also note that the work is divided into three basic study realms: (1) perceptions of the landscape, (2) material culture as a reaction to these perceptions, and (3) ritual and play as a consequence of these attitudes. Because material culture and ritual/play grow from these beliefs, they also provide excellent ways to further explore these belief structures. Such concepts are important, and will be reiterated in the *Introduction*. For now, however, I will briefly discuss my informant pool, and how the information base for this research was acquired.

I turned to individuals that I knew from the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*, regulars to *Mountain West Off-Road* (fig: P.6), and to associates that I knew through my experiences at the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. My choice for this informant base was logical for three reasons: (1) these individuals know and trust me; (2) I am familiar with this group through rock crawling related activities; and (3) these individuals are easy to contact. In fact, upon first arriving in Utah—from St. John's, Newfoundland—for my fieldwork during April, 1996, I went directly to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*

*Inc.* I knew that I could contact many of my informants there right away. Within several hours I had met many of them. I even conducted several taped interviews

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**FIG: P.6** The store-front of *Mountain West Off-Road Supply Inc.* Bay doors for the shop are behind the store.

in the office that I had occupied when previously working at that establishment.

Between 1990 and 1997 I conducted more than twenty-five tape-recorded interviews. Each of these hour to two hour sessions produced oral narratives and commentary, as well as details concerning vehicle modification strategies. These came from both seasoned veteran drivers and neophyte participants. Informants such as Victor Mokler, Randy Robinson, Allan Olsen, Matt Smith, Chip Brox, Berr Knight, Justin Rex, and others, discussed trails they had driven, vehicle modifications they have made (and plan to make), and answered questions I posed

as part of the interviews. Many produced pictures to illustrate the concepts they were discussing. One informant, David Jarvis, even used topographic and U.S. Forest Service maps to detail trails and to note the challenging locations and spots where events he discussed had taken place.

Informal discussions among *Mountain West Off-Road Supply* customers, at stops along trail rides, and during other instances of what Robert McCarl has termed "cultural scenes," have also provided material for this work (1993, 72). Often such non-formal situations—like *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers'* club meetings—produce the most illuminating information. Discussions freely move from topic to topic, offering myself as an ethnographer chances to see how issues are interconnected, and how individuals react differently to the subjects of discussion.

It should not come as a surprise that one of the best sources for this type of information was the trail ride milieu itself. In at least eight instances, during the *Easter Jeep Safari*, I took notes while participating in Moab, Utah, area trail rides. These notes document information such as the numbers and ages of the participants, who leads the trail rides, interesting comments made by those in attendance, driving styles and habits, well modified vehicles, cultural taboos, breaches of these taboos, reactions to these infractions, games played during rest stops, and any other information which seemed germane to this research.

Information has also been culled from trail journals written by Ed Isaacson and Eugene Scofield. These journals comprise written accounts detailing trail rides they have taken. These personal accounts are often shared by the writers with their



friends and relatives as a way to relive off-road experiences. During my research in 1996, as I was meeting informants at *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, Dan Wynkoop—the store owner—gave me a thick manilla envelope. He told me that “Doc” Ed Isaacson, a local Rock Crawler, had dropped it off at the shop while I was temporarily away with another informant. The envelope had “Dr. Dave” written on the cover. Inside was a note explaining that Ed hoped sections of his trail journal and accompanying photographs, included in the envelope, would be helpful to my research. The photos of his family and Jeep during off-road excursions were excellent; the journal proved to be a treasure. It was a twenty-three page, single-spaced, account of the trail rides Ed and his family had travelled during the previous years. Excerpts from this journal appear throughout the following pages. One complete three page edition of Eugene’s journal—replete with full-color pictures scanned in—appears in chapter five.

Material from magazines aimed at off-road enthusiasts has also proven useful. These publications are: *4-Wheeler*, *Petersen’s 4-Wheel & Off Road*, *4x4 Mechanix* (now *4x4 Performance*), *4x4 Power*, and *4-Wheel Drive & Sport Utility Magazine* (published specifically for Rock Crawlers, by Rock Crawlers). These magazines are excellent informational sources because the writers are off-roaders themselves. Therefore, they address issues of concern to off-roaders in general; frequently they focus upon issues specific to rock crawling. For instance, often trail ride reviews are published in magazines. These detail how to get to a trail, where to go while on the trail, sights that can be expected, ratings on how difficult the trail

is, and what modifications need to be made to a vehicle to complete the ride. Such information is priceless for studies concerning cultural perceptions of these places.

New internet sites are opening for Rock Crawlers with increasing regularity. Attempting to use as many differing sources as possible, I have visited at least fifty of these. They are invaluable research tools. Some detail modifications to vehicles and why these changes are necessary. Photographs often accompany this information.<sup>4</sup> While allowing enthusiasts to "show and tell" their 4x4's, it also provides viewers with new or different information they might not learn through their local networks. Other sites detail trails; these include information on what to bring for a trip and what modifications must be made to vehicles.<sup>5</sup> Photos even show the kind of vistas travellers can expect. This new technology is becoming a major networking format. Trail rides attended by people from many different states are often planned via web sites specifically originated to plan the event.

I spotted Glenn Wakefield's radically modified Samurai while browsing through pictures at a Rock Crawler internet home page. Recognizing this rig from the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, I sent him an e-mail. The message initiated e-mail conversations, information trading, and a series of question and answer sessions. A portion of my interviews with Victor Mokler were also conducted through

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<sup>4</sup> For a cite detailing the suspension and frame modifications to a 1966-1977 Ford Bronco, see: <http://rogue.northwest.com/~ultimate/nvb/visit/quinn.htm>. Another cite details dashboard modifications for the same style vehicle: <http://eelink.umich.edu/~p-nowak/bronco/kentdash.html>.

<sup>5</sup> For a several of these evaluations, with pictures taken along the trails, visit: [www.off-road.com](http://www.off-road.com).

the net.

In an attempt to visually document as much of the rock crawling culture as possible, I have taken approximately six hundred photographs. The goal of these photos was to capture the material, as well as the social, aspects of this group. To accomplish this, photographs were made during trail rides in central Utah and on trails near Moab (in southern Utah), at club meetings and parties, and while vehicles were being modified in shops or at private residences. I also made appointments to photograph vehicles during varying stages of their modification processes. Additional photos have documented the landscapes and trails through which Rock Crawlers travel. The resulting collection of photos was used for reference during the writing of this work, and many have been included within the following pages as visual information for readers.

Additional photos have come from sources besides myself and the internet. During an interview with Dr. Jim Broadbent following the 1996 *Jeep Safari*, Jim pulled out several photographs he and his son had taken. I was astounded by their ability to capture the harsh realities of the driving conditions common to rock crawling. Many—including myself—take pictures of these experiences only to find that the prints rarely show how “radical” the circumstances really were. I asked Jim if he could forward copies of several prints to Newfoundland for incorporation into my work. He made nearly one thousand available to me. Quinn Mortensen, Victor Mokler, Dan Wynkoop, Ed Isaacson, Mark Milner, Ken Harrison, Jeff Beach and others, have also kindly donated photos to this project.

Visual information for this work also came by way of video tapes. Six hours

of home video filmed during trail rides in the Moab, Utah, area were provided to me by Dan Wynkoop. This tape represents more than Dan's work; it also contains sequences from a few of his Californian acquaintances. Footage made by members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* was also included on the tape. For further video research, I purchased three professionally edited tapes from *Sidekick Off Road Maps*. Each of these documents a trail ride over one of western America's most difficult trails. Viewers get to see the vistas and challenges that can be expected on the featured trail. The tapes also detail what modifications must be made to a vehicle to complete the trails, and what camping gear and spare parts should be also taken. I also used a two hour video documentary of the 1992 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* that was filmed and edited by *Bear Creek Productions*. Although this video documents more than one trail ride, it resembles those from *Sidekick Off Road Maps* in scope and content.

The tapes were sources for watching and evaluating driving styles and techniques. Often, the tapes would capture drivers and their spotters discussing approaches to obstacles. Such instances reveal cultural notions of performance and responsibility which form the underlying tone of the trail ride experience. The tapes also provided conversations and other forms of group interaction which could be checked and re-checked while formulating approaches to the outback social dynamic.

This dissertation, generated through a combination of the above-mentioned approaches and sources, is an attempt to elucidate the Western American Rock

Crawling community's perceptions of, and subsequent interaction with, the environment. Although hodge-podge, and even eclectic, this wide variety of sources will--I hope--provide readers with a well-rounded image of the Rock Crawling community. It is my hope that these pages will do more than educate readers. I have attempted to write a work that is also enjoyable to read.

## LIFE ON THE ROCKS

The profoundest implications of human experience are never stated rationally, never with explicitness, but indirectly in what we agree to call art forms, rhythms, festivals, designs, melodies, objective symbolic substitutions. (Austin, 440)

In the western United States, as in other regions of the country, more and more 4-wheel drive vehicles are appearing on the roads. Many can be seen as they are driven out of town with mountain bikes perched on their roofs. Others are used to tow boats or campers to special vacation spots. Still others are modified and used for exploring trails that wind through the mountain and desert areas extending through the west's spaces. There are multiple recreational 4-wheel drive based communities.

For many, the term "4-wheeling" conjures images of trucks blasting through mud or pounding across rocky fields, like on television commercials. You may think of super-tall monster trucks with mega-engines—like *Bigfoot*—vaulting over cars in stadiums. However, there is another kind of 4-wheeling that is less well known. This is *Rock Crawling*, a form of off-roading that involves creeping over extreme territory at speeds rarely exceeding five to ten miles-per-hour. The trails these enthusiasts travel are rough. Driving along them has been referred to as "climbing

over boulders as tall as your hood, straddling ravines deep enough to swallow your rig, and working your way up rocky steps and ledges" (DeLong, 1997, 48).

Rock Crawlers—that is what members of this community call themselves—can trace the history of their culture back to World War II. Prior to the war, the United States military still relied primarily upon horses for moving people and heavy equipment to and from battlefields. But as the war flared, military leaders decided that the horse was no longer an appropriate form of locomotive power (Farquhar, Holder & Wescott, 12). A motorized, yet nimble, vehicle was needed to help fight in the new mechanized age of war.

This decision resulted in a flurry of creative approaches to transportation systems. Eventually, a small, light vehicle which came to be called a "Jeep," was created. The initial Jeep designs came from several companies. They were similar in that each of the vehicles were relatively small, light weight, could maneuver in rough terrain, and most important, they had four wheel drive. This combination resulted in vehicles that excelled in the arduous conditions ubiquitous to the military milieu.

After the war, many returning soldiers from rural areas purchased surplus war Jeeps, realizing their worth as work vehicles. In fact, photos occasionally appear which show them with farm machinery—such as hay balers or plows crudely attached to their frames. It was not long before a civilian model—the CJ2A—was marketed to the masses. This 4x4, like its military predecessor, found its way primarily onto rural farms.

Owners of the little 4x4s (they were much smaller than today's Jeeps) soon

realized that their value was not relegated solely to drudgery in the fields. In the late 50s, as recreational cultures evolved in America, the uses for Jeeps expanded. Owners not only used their machines for sod busting, but to test their own abilities as drivers in difficult terrains common to their region. Many purchased them solely for their recreational benefits. Realizing this new market, companies made sure that other vehicles such as Broncos, Scouts, Jeep Grand Wagoneers, Land Rovers, and Toyota Landcruisers were produced to fill the demand. Recreationalists came to have a wide variety of choices as they prepared to explore.

At this point, vehicle modifications were relegated primarily to those few improvements that people could make at home. Most of these consisted of racks or brackets to carry camping gear and spare parts. Then, in the late 60s, enthusiasts began opening shops specializing in off-road oriented suspensions, tires, and lights. Vehicles were no longer limited to factory original heights or tire sizes. The types and difficulty of the terrain people accessed changed dramatically. Now 4x4s could attempt much more difficult trails. This enabled drivers to go farther from urban centers.

Over the years specialty equipment has become increasingly technical. In the 60s enthusiasts were content with a few inches of increased vehicle height, slightly taller tires, and any light that was brighter than a stock headlight. Now, in the 90s, vehicle suspensions not only range from conservative height increases like 2 inches, but to radical heights, like 12 inches. Tires now exist to perform better than stock units in a plethora of extremely specific environmental milieus. Lights have also been created to perform in a host of situations.



In different sections of the country, regional terrains gradually sprouted differing types of off-roading pursuits. For instance, in Louisiana the swampy terrain gave rise to groups dedicated to “bogging” through the deep waters and muck that is common to that area. In the western states, such as Utah, folks spent time climbing over and through boulder-strewn deserts. As would be expected, regional differences in the physical environment affects the culture of the people building and driving these 4x4s. Both the form of the vehicles used to access these places and the attitudes and driving styles of these people are quite disparate from one region to another.

Due to the rocky terrain common to the western deserts, Rock Crawling evolved in this region. As increasing numbers of people gravitated to the sport, clubs have arose. Many clubs have, and continue to, sponsor off-roading events; for instance, the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers*, in Moab, Utah, have been a long-time sponsor of the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. Such meets continue to offer and promote driving and socializing today.

Despite its World War II origins, rock crawling seems to have moved away from a military ethos. Rather than the rigorous competition which drives militaristic pursuits, rock crawling thrives on a notion that the 4x4 “vehicle allows people to be different; it allows people to take off from the asphalt of the urban jungle and explore the most rugged countryside far from the madding crowd. Or at least it offers that potential, that chance to dream” (Fryatt & Scott, 14).

Rock Crawlers venture into the desert and mountain areas ubiquitous to the west as places of retreat. This behavior gives participants the chance to

"turn...attention away from the 'Ordinary' world" in which they live their normal lives (Hufford, 1992, 7). Rarely going alone, drivers, their families, and friends progress along trails winding through areas they dub "the outback." Outback locations are culturally created "enclaves" of great importance (8). Mentally bounded from their surrounding territory, they are maintained as locations for highly ritualized play. Members work from the assumption that activities taking place in the outback not only affect one's membership within the community, but also positively affect one's productivity as a member of society in general.

With the outback playing such a pivotal role for communal cohesion and structure, it is understandable that material culture is also affected by the perceptions and involvement with these places (Ryden, 73). The vehicles used for trail access easily exemplify this dynamic. Their morphologies (or their structural formulations) fit them precisely to the outback milieu that their builders favor. As such, many 4x4's "speak" of the places they are taken. Essentially, the vehicles are physical representations of their builders/drivers interaction, mental and physical, with the special places known as the outback.<sup>1</sup>

As an ethnographer, I have been intrigued by the power of the outback. I was interested in studying a place imbued with the power to transform individuals and, in turn, the objects they use. Why are these zones so important? What do they mean? How do they become so? By what process do they exert their power over the people and vehicles that venture through them? These questions are poignant

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<sup>1</sup> For more on objects as representations of their builders/users perceptions and values, see: Upton, 1991, 156-69.

to me, not solely due to my ethnographic training but also because I, myself, am a Rock Crawler.

In the broader scheme of things, these questions are pertinent because Rock Crawlers are part of a web comprising multiple communities currently utilizing technology to access the landscape. That is, other communities have their own gestalts concerning access and use of the same locations. As such, this research is a means for discussing concerns that are rapidly becoming tender spots in the North American (especially Western United States) "nature"-oriented ideological and political spheres. In a climate with escalating concern over the health of wilderness spaces, land usage issues confronting Rock Crawlers also affect the activities and values of myriad other communities.<sup>2</sup>

The increasing popularity of outdoor leisure activities is currently forcing rock climbers, mountain bikers, campers, hunters, snowmobilers, the boating community, and others to face the irony that they are utilizing potentially harmful equipment to access outdoor landscapes as a means of escaping the urban world created by our technological age. Many are now asking if humans can interact in a sensitive way with the wilderness. Rock Crawlers have some cultural safeguards built into their outback behavior that could serve as examples of how awareness to this potential problem can change the ways in which people act while in these spaces.

The Rock Crawling community, then, can become a means for examining

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<sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the tensions existing between the need to protect our environment while also enjoying it, see: "Canadian Parks: Re-imagining the Land--Forever Wild?"

perspectives of the landscape, access to these spaces, and the affect of these places upon those venturing there. These are factors common to many groups utilizing outdoor locations. As such, I have attempted to create a study that looks at these issues in ways that encourage readers to expand their knowledge of these issues into the diverse spheres of the groups to which they belong.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PRACTICES OF THE ROCK CRAWLING COMMUNITY**

It is believed by Rock Crawlers that the sport's evolution can be traced to W.W.II G.I.s, who became enamoured with the go-anywhere vehicles they used during the war. Once home, veterans tested the abilities of surplus military Jeeps on their local terrains. The motorsport quickly progressed to where stock (unmodified) vehicles no longer provided the growing community with the mechanical abilities needed for manouvering in the driving conditions they enjoyed. As groups built rigs suited to the environments they frequented, different 4x4 communities evolved. Rock Crawlers, as noted, frequent rugged mountain or desert locations.

The cliché that "necessity is the mother of invention" best describes Rock Crawlers, as it was not long before they were "fabricating," or custom-building, the modifications needed to answer challenges the outback extremes provided. Now, the modification of one's rig is not only necessitated by the landscape, but also has become a communal expectation. It is a means for expressing one's personal

relationship with the land.<sup>3</sup>

While within the outback, driving expectations vary considerably from those of the daily milieu. Trails represent more than rutted or worn paths. Drivers, like other recreationalists, seek "a variety of elements" and extremes that push their driving skills—and the abilities of their vehicles—to the utmost limit (Bale, 126). This means that most trails are routinely so difficult that they absorb every ounce of the participants' concentration and energy to master them (fig: I.1).

Many of the trails have ledges that must be scaled or descended. These ledges are called "drop-offs," or "waterfalls," regardless of the presence or lack of water. Many are greater than six feet in height and climbing them can place vehicles at angles of sixty degrees or more. Occasionally a 4x4 "sits" on its front or rear bumper. In such instances the vehicle literally balances on that bumper—sometimes with no tires on the ground—hanging for seconds that seem like hours, before settling back onto all of its tires. Although not intended, such instances do occur, and occasionally end in the disaster of a rolled machine.

Other trails literally climb over fields of boulders ranging in size from two to ten feet in height. Vehicles plunge at off-camber angles, seemingly ready to roll at any second. Large crevices and cracks regularly appear in trails (fig: I.2). These must be traversed or straddled. Some trails necessitate the constant use of winches—mounted to the vehicles—to pull them over seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Progress in these situations is not measured in miles-per-hour, but in

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<sup>3</sup> For more concerning vehicles as personal expression, see: Jo Mueller, 10-37.



**FIG: I.1** Jim Cole gets some help in a tough spot from fellow trail ride participants. (Courtesy Jim Cole)



**FIG: I.2** Jeff Dixon crosses the *Golden Crack* on the *Golden Spike* trail. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)

feet per-hour.

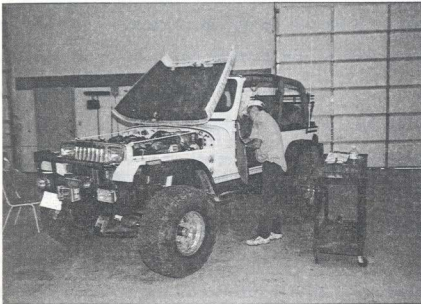
But all trails are not dry. Many have river crossings. Swollen by melting mountain snow, rivers can reach heights that would swallow a normal car. Drivers attempting these must be careful that such crossings are not too deep, or that the current is not too swift. Some crossings are so deep that water seeps in through the door wells, flooding the vehicle's floor-boards. If the same trail were traversed in the winter, drivers would concentrate on climbing through deep snow. During some rides over wintery mountain passes, vehicles have had snow push up over their hoods as they moved along.

Obviously, 4x4s used for such endeavors are far from their stock, factory original, form. And hours upon hours are spent building and prepping them for their outback performance. Victor Mokler, owner of a well-modified Jeep CJ-7, noted that he spends at least four hours of each week working on his Jeep (5/1997). He seems to be within the community median.

Most vehicle owners do as much of the work to their vehicle as their abilities enable. The amount and difficulty of this work varies widely among drivers. For instance, Victor does "about seventy-five percent of the work on [his] Jeep" (5/13/1997). These modifications and maintenance often occur in one's garage: "I do all my work there. Except for the stuff I have to fix on the trail, that is" (Victor Mokler, 5/13/1997). It is not unusual for a Rock Crawler to rent a storage unit specially for working on their 4x4. All the work that can be competently done is carried out at these locations.

Others, like Jim Broadbent, do less of the physical work on their machine. He

usually plans the modifications to his rig, but has specialists actually undertake the work. Drivers "farm-out" to specialists what cannot be done at home due to a lack of ability or specialized tools (fig: I.3). Although another person may be doing the actual work, the vehicle owner is usually involved with the specialist in the planning (and even building) stages. Being "hands-on" is key:



**FIG: I.3** David Mosher, mechanic at *Mountain West Off-Road*, prepares Jim Broadbent's Jeep for rugged off-road usage on the *Dakota Challenge* trails in South Dakota.

I do all the body work and painting, all the electrical work etcetera. The engine will be built by a machine shop, and I have the differentials and gear work and welding done by a shop. I purchase most parts pre-made rather than fabricating things myself...That's not to say that I don't make things myself, but most of the stuff I buy. (Victor Mokler, 5/13/1997, italics added)

It is not uncommon for vehicle builders to "help" in shops alongside the specialists, checking the work or discussing the outcome of a given change.



Modifications not meeting rigid specifications are redone. Since heavy stresses are routinely placed on the vehicles, they are built to exacting tolerances or they cannot be relied upon.

Building the vehicles often becomes a social event. Friends and colleagues congregate to assist or talk as the work progresses (fig: 1.4). "I...do the real heavy work at my friend's house, in his garage" (Victor Mokler, 5/13/1997). From planning stages to completion and usage on the trail, the 4x4's are a locus for group interaction. Rarely are individuals seen working on their vehicle alone. As such, the 4x4s become zones for socializing.

A [building] project...is great fun if you like *endless hours of comparing, exchanging, and arguing ideas and experiences around the campfire or in the garage*. Oh yeah, you had better like your garage, because it will likely become the place where your mail will be forwarded and meals eaten. (Werkmeister, 1997, 38, italics added)

As the group becomes involved in work or discussion, the 4x4 becomes the focus for an enclave of escape from the mundane world (Hufford, 1992, 8).

But despite friends helping and work done at home, these vehicles do not come cheap. Serious rock crawling machines can be expected to cost at least fifteen to twenty thousand dollars. And many cost much more:

[Dennis] Noes'...vehicle modifications were done specifically for off-highway travel. And although he spent approximately \$5,000 outfitting his vehicle, he classifies himself as only mid-level enthusiast. "Hard-core 4-wheelers spend as much as \$40,000 just accessorizing their vehicles," he says. "And that doesn't include what they spend on the purchase of the vehicle itself." (Alfreda Vaughn, 16)

It is not unusual to see units that cost between fifty and one hundred-thousand



**FIG: L4** During the Summer of 1997, David Mosher (left), Quinn Mortensen (right), and David Jarvis (above), helped the author install a new motor in his 1975 Ford Bronco. Such group efforts are common.

dollars on trails these days.<sup>4</sup> Most vehicles are not the result of a single modification spree entailing these funds. Rather, they are the result of years and years of constant refining and rebuilding. Each 4x4 is the outcome of years of research and testing. Their owners know them as intimately as they know themselves. They have to; in many cases their personal safety on outback challenges relies upon this connection.

Rock crawling requires a high level of commitment from its adherents. In fact, many note this commitment to the off-roading lifestyle by saying that rock crawling

<sup>4</sup> Concerning rock crawling rig construction, Alfreda D. Vaughn observes: "Money appears to be no object to off-highway consumers. The average person spends \$3,010 each year for specialty equipment...in connection with what some sources deem a "lifestyle" rather than a mere leisure-time pursuit" (16).

is a "religion."<sup>5</sup> Religion or not, rock crawling requires considerable time, and its activities reflect and affect the world view and values of those involved.

## MECHANICS OF THE PRESENTATION

It is important to discuss the presentation mechanics. Readers should note that the meaning of *rock crawler* varies, depending upon its context. Since members of the rock crawling community refer to themselves, and their vehicles, by the same name, I do likewise. To avoid confusion, the people are designated as *Rock Crawlers*, while the vehicles are signified as *rock crawlers*. The vehicles are also referred to as: *vehicles*, *4x4s*, and *rigs*. These terms are used as synonyms for *rock crawler* by the community; I use these expressions similarly. The terms *outback* and *back country* are used alternatively throughout the text, and carry essentially the same connotation for members of the community.

*Rock Crawler* and *off-roader*, however, are *not* used synonymously. *Off-roader* is a generic term, referring to all communities utilizing 4-wheel drive vehicles to interact with their physical environment. (The term *4-wheeler* carries essentially the same meaning as *off-roader*.) *Rock Crawlers* are merely one of these many groups. This distinction, although not always used in such a clear-cut fashion by *Rock Crawlers*, is the only way I can rhetorically distinguish between these groups

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<sup>5</sup> Bale has commented on the "almost quasi-religious or spiritual significance" of sportscapes and sport related materials (120).

in the body of this work without resorting to extensive explanations each time I use a term.

I have tried to use terminology common to the group whenever possible. This informs readers of the rock crawling lexicon, and provides a richer view of the community, how they speak, and how they interact. In many places a full description of the term—within the text—would break the rhetorical flow. Thus, some terms, if used rarely within the text, will be described with a footnote. If the term is a recurrent one, it will be highlighted with bold print followed by an asterisk (**bold\***). This indicates that a full description can be found in the *Glossary*.

During transcribed interviews I followed a few conventions. Italicized sections (*italics*) indicate that the speaker has placed emphasis on that word or phrase. Ellipses (...) indicate that a false start or extraneous section of discourse has been eliminated. And double hyphens (--) indicate a pause in the speech flow, or a change of thought in mid-sentence. All other standard writing conventions have been retained. For instance, language usage has been transcribed according to accepted spelling conventions (ex: 'bout = about).

Maps are a necessary for considering the landscape. Several appear in chapters throughout this work; each deals with issues specific to the discussion at hand. Addressed in these maps are: trail locations, places on specific trails, and routes taken to access trails. At the forepart of this work, following this introduction, are two maps: *Frontice map 1* and *Frontice map 2*. Frontice map 1 (F map 1) illustrates some of the important trails in the western states. Frontice map 2 (F map

2) details the locations of trails specific to the Moab, Utah, area. Trails appearing on these maps are discussed throughout this work, and readers will be directed to use the maps as references when these trails are noted.

Readers will notice that the vast majority of my informants are post adolescent males. This is because Rock Crawlers are primarily males. Although they come from all age strata, "the[ir] average age is 37.9 years" (Alfreda Vaughn, 17). Using surveys made by the *Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association* (SEMA), Alfreda Vaughn, editor of *Truck Accessory News: Products and Trends for Aftermarket Retailers*,<sup>5</sup> compiled the following statistics about the ages of Rock Crawlers: "21.3 percent are 41 to 50 years old; 19.2 percent, 25 years old or younger; 15.5 percent, 51 to 65 years old and 13.6 percent, 36 to 40 years old" (17).

Despite the preponderance of males, Rock Crawlers believe that theirs is a family-based automotive sport; that is, families regularly venture into the back country, *not* solo individuals. It should also be noted that there is a growing contingent of active female drivers. Nevertheless, the *trail ride* scenario is still predominantly a male milieu.<sup>7</sup> Although many women thoroughly enjoy the outback,

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<sup>5</sup> *Truck Accessory News* is a trade magazine aimed specifically at retailers of aftermarket accessories for light-duty trucks (pick up trucks), sport utility vehicles (Broncos and Blazers etc), and recreational vehicles (Jeeps, Samurais etc).

<sup>7</sup> The landscapes these individuals travel "may be regarded as highly masculinized in the sense that while claiming to be 'the norm' they have [had] a long tradition of excluding or ignoring women." This is now changing. However, "the relative underpopulation of this landscape by women results less from their active opposition to incorporation into an activity dominated by men than from the widespread view that [this milieu] is still basically a masculine activity" (Bale, 7). For comments concerning "ecomasculinism," or the "masculine challenge to the emphatic relationship

their sense of these spaces tends not to be as vehicle-centered as is the male perception.<sup>8</sup> For instance, most of the vehicles are built, driven, and maintained by men. Many women, on the other hand, note: "I get out often and watch...I also look at plants and animals. I enjoy that as much, if not more, than riding in the actual vehicle" (Becci Neal, 2/26/1997).

The male vehicle-centered approach to the outback seems to support the notion that such places "provide both a playground and a testing ground for male prowess" (O'Brien, 173).<sup>9</sup> The difference in how the landscape is appreciated is further evinced by the fact that *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, the location for much of my networking and research, has a clientele composed almost entirely of men. The bulk of this work, then, deals primarily with male values and perceptions.

The study is organized into three distinct thematic spheres which are crucial for elucidating Rock Crawlers' landscape perceptions: (1) ***Values and Belief: Perceiving the Land***, (2) ***The Vehicles: Traversing the Land***, and (3) ***Communitas: Celebrating the Land***. Each of these spheres is discussed within its own section; these sections are in turn subdivided, each containing two chapters. The conclusion discusses the significant issues each section raises in regards to interaction within cultural landscapes.

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with nature," see: Bale, 133.

<sup>8</sup> This perception could also be due to the fact that "very often the car remains a male preserve" (Jean Baudrillard, 68).

<sup>9</sup> See also: Cook, 213-29.

## VALUES AND BELIEF: PERCEIVING THE LAND

What motivates individuals to drive expensive and time consuming vehicles on such extreme trails? Section one details how the rock crawling community perceives the physical environment.<sup>10</sup> That is, these landscapes are discussed as culturally constructed places. Such perceptions are the result of—and result in—specific “cognitive and image based” processes (Rapoport, 129). Chapter one, entitled *The West: A Symbolic Landscape*, elucidates the Rock Crawling community by locating their place as one of the myriad communities valuing the Western landscapes. To discuss this social milieu, these communities are divided into three traditional spheres: *extraction* groups, *preservationist* groups, and *recreational* groups. These spheres are classified according to the values and importance each set places upon the landscape.

Extraction-based communities value the land for its useable resources, preservationists attempt to protect these spaces, while recreationalists seek these places for their sport-related benefits. Rock Crawlers are one group among the host of recreational cultures seeking access to these places, which are often physically and perceptually distanced from the urban sphere. As with many other recreational communities, this group favors these lands because of the tripartite benefits that they offer: prospect, refuge, and hazard (Bale, 122; Appleton, 1990, 25-6).

Prospect refers to aesthetically appealing views provided by the land. As

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<sup>10</sup> For a book-length study of the landscape as perception and construct, see: John Brinckerhoff Jackson's *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*.

such, recreational pursuits within these places is motivated and enhanced by an appreciation of these panoramas (Appleton, 1996, 262). Refuge is fostered by a place's ability to provide sensations of shelter or escape, primarily emotional for this discussion. That is, the land is seen as Other, a deliverance from the work-a-day world (Wilson, 19-51). Hazard refers to the possibility for danger or thrill presented through encounters with the land. Examples of this "sensation...are provided by [activities such as] screaming as loud as one can [while] racing downhill, and tobogganing;" other activities such as mountain biking, white water rafting, and even rock crawling also exemplify the quest for hazard (Caillois, 24).

These lands, seen as important to the very existence of the Rock Crawling community, are contested spaces. As such, they must vie for the ability--and sometimes the right--to access these places. Due to the confrontational nature of the desert and mountain places Rock Crawlers value, their relations with other communities who also esteem these locations are often strained. This tense social milieu is a direct result of the clashing ideologies concerning the value and character imparted to the landscape. This conflict in turn affects how Rock Crawlers interact with the land, and what they see as the future of their way of life.

Chapter two, entitled *Designating and Using the Outback*, studies how the outback is bounded and separated as a special place through cognitive, or mentally-held, maps (Downs & Stea, 6-7; Francaviglia, VI). These maps are composed and delineated through culturally-specific names (Basso, 1983, 24; Basso, 1988, 102; Cronon, 65-6). Although such names may not appear on topographic maps, and may not be relevant to the general public, they are of supreme importance to those



using them. They conjure histories, vistas, "important themes" and specific challenges to those familiar with them (Ryden, 115). This process creates culturally-specific places where none may have existed before (Casey, 14).

A passion for both these cultural places, and vehicles which are potentially damaging to them, causes pressure from within the group. Often these ideologies come into conflict with each other, eliciting specific behavior-modifying activities within the community that mediate these inevitable clashes. These actions are designed to "protect" the land; yet they have often become means unto themselves.

### THE VEHICLES: TRAVERSING THE LAND

Chapter three, entitled *The Impact of Terrain Upon Vehicle Form*, investigates how a "two way interaction" with the outback affects (Rapoport, 130), and is reflected and buttressed through, material aspects of the rock crawling culture (Moore, 36; Hufford, 1990, 49; Ryden, 73).<sup>11</sup> "Creation entails use," thus vehicle modifications are direct reactions to attitudes and experiences involving these places; practical and mythical values concerning back country provide the impetus for vehicle modification (Glassie, 1991, 259).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Lubar has noted: "Objects are cultural artifacts, shaped by the society that uses them. They form the boundaries between us and the natural world we inhabit. They mediate our experience of our environment...They do this not as...passive intermediaries but rather as agents, always creating the world anew....Objects change the world, and we constantly rediscover and redefine the world through objects" (197).

<sup>12</sup> See also: Hufford, 1990, 42-4.

Practical values influence construction in myriad ways (Pye, 1967, 46-53); not only are suspension changes and tire tread designs dictated by the realities of the land, so are body modifications such as wheel well shapes. Yet, mythologised perceptions of the wilderness also affect these modifications, as well as other components, like the usage of chrome, and paint job colors and schemes (Poulsen, 10). As products of this dynamic involving the outback, rock crawlers are "not only in context: context is in [them]" (Glassie, 1991, 260).

Chapter four, entitled *Performance and Design in Rock Crawler Morphology*, discusses how the creation of a praiseworthy vehicle not only signifies mastery of a "build-up"<sup>13</sup> grammar, or "mental dialectic" (Glassie, 1975, 17), determined by the group, but asserts a cognizance of the group's landscape metaphors (Upton, 1979, 117-32). In a milieu where vehicles exist as such tropes, there is, as one would expect, a definite tradition—or "mental language"—surrounding their construction (Hubka, 428).<sup>14</sup> In situations where communication is the result of such grammars, issues of "competence inevitably come up" (Rapoport, 130). Furthermore, while revealing the individuality of the owner, vehicles communicate—actively project—traditions the group holds regarding specific landscapes (Ryden, 57, 65; Upton, 1991, 158-9). Where there is tradition, there is also room for personal

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<sup>13</sup> *Build-up* is the term used by Rock Crawlers to describe the process of creating a rock crawling vehicle.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of current theories concerning building grammars, see: Michael Anne Williams & M. Jane Young, 40-54.

creativity. The tension existing between these two (dynamic)<sup>15</sup> creative forces promotes vehicles that are always technically fresh, mechanically current, and visually exciting.

### COMMUNITAS: CELEBRATING THE LAND

The chapters in section three deal with "the environment as catalyst" for social interaction (Rapoport, 129). Expanses of the Western American mountain and desert topography are "carefully isolated" and serve as festival and ritual locations for the community, due to their "sacred" standing (Caillois, 6).<sup>16</sup> These events, products of specific locations, affect changes in those who participate. Chapter five, entitled *Socializing in the Outback*, describes the trail ride social dynamic. Back country places are enjoyed by groups; rarely do Rock Crawlers venture within these locations alone. Attitudes concerning its "liminal" nature foster highly structured ritual and play "phases" (Victor Turner, 1991, 11).<sup>17</sup> Specialized behavior, called off-road "etiquette," accompanies all phases of the outback experience, and mediates how individuals interact with the landscape as well as their

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<sup>15</sup> Dynamics in folklore have been discussed at-length by Barre Toelken, see: *The Dynamics of Folklore*.

<sup>16</sup> Frames and boundaries, see also: Bateson, 201-27.

<sup>17</sup> See also: Driver, 157-65; Huizinga, 12; Van Gennep, 21.

vehicles and each other (Nylund, 102).<sup>18</sup> Outback excursions, then, become platforms for highly ritualized communal "fellowship," performance, and play, while escaping the constrictive nature of urban life (Hufford, 1992, 51).<sup>19</sup>

Chapter six, *Experiencing the Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, reveals my experience(s) as a trail ride participant at the safari. My perceptions of the event are presented through two different writing styles. The dynamic generated between these antithetical documentary formats is aimed at creating a dialectic which attempts to balance my personal and "subjective" feelings with a critical and "objective" reading of the event. Through the "complementarity" established by this format, readers will get a more full understanding of what I experience as a trail ride participant (Turnbull, 51). Hopefully, the action, excitement, and fun of the trail rides will also be revealed.

## TECHNOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

People often have negative knee-jerk reactions when they learn of driving through the back country in 4x4s; they question if people can truly interact with the "natural" environment in a sensitive and non-violent way. The multitudes of individuals in other recreational pursuits now thronging to these spaces for their

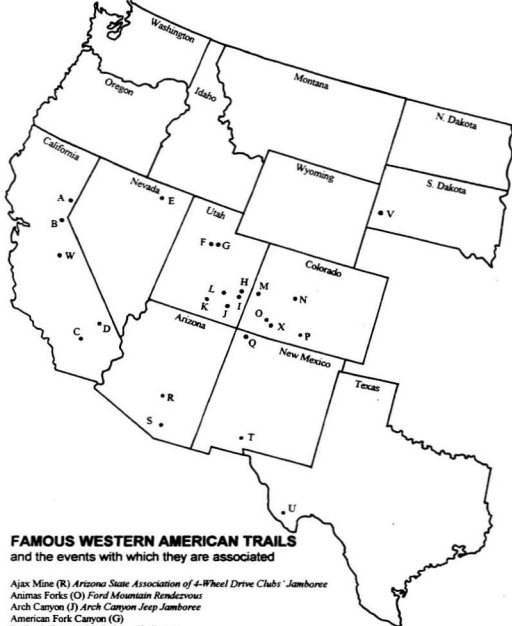
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<sup>18</sup> For more on rules and regulations in play, see: Caillois, 8, 27; Dunk, 72; Hughes, 95-103; Huizinga, 11.

<sup>19</sup> For more on phratania, see: Huizinga, 12, 16; Hufford, 1992, 53.

leisure activities also spur the more specific question: can technology and the outback interact in a means that is not ultimately destructive to these spaces? These issues lead interested parties to question who is allowed to access public lands. In fact, many individuals and groups go a step farther, urging that humans and their "mechanized modes of transport....should be excluded from [these] areas" altogether (Sierra Club, <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/408.html>).

Such extremes may not always--should not always--be necessary. In fact, many Rock Crawlers question if these tactics should be allowed in a day when the pressures of urban world are believed to be more prevalent than ever (Steele, 79). Such differences of opinion arise from contrasting gestalts concerning the meaning, value, and significance, of wilderness spaces. These diverging concepts lead to varying ways of protecting or utilizing these places. Chapter one begins with a discussion of how Rock Crawlers fit into the host of differing views regarding Western lands. These conflicting views often lead to social friction. Rock Crawlers must find, and hold to, the back country places they enjoy within this climate.



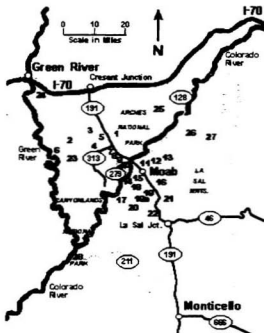
## **FAMOUS WESTERN AMERICAN TRAILS** and the events with which they are associated

Ajax Mine (R) *Arizona State Association of 4-Wheel Drive Clubs' Jamboree*  
 Animas Forks (O) *Ford Mountain Rendezvous*  
 Arch Canyon (J) *Arch Canyon Jeep Jamboree*  
 American Fork Canyon (G)  
 Badlands Boogie (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Bear Valley Loop (A) *Sierra Trek*  
 Behind the Rocks (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Black Bear Pass (O) *Ford Mountain Rendezvous*  
 Buzzwords (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Chicken Corners (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Chokecherry Canyon (Q)  
 Clawhammer (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Frontice Map 1

Dark Canyon (J)  
 Doll House (L)  
 Dusy-Ershim (W)  
 Engineer Pass (X)  
 Fins 'N' Things (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Fordyce Creek (A) *Sierra Trek*  
 The Guardian (T) *Southwest Four Wheel Drive Association-Las Cruces*  
 Hal Johns (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Hell's Gate (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Hell's Revenge (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Hole in the Rock (K)  
 Holy Cross (N)  
 Hotel Rock (J)  
 Iceman (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Imogene Pass (O) *Ford Mountain Rendezvous*  
 Intimidator (Q)  
 Italian Trap (S)  
 Jackhammer (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Kane Creek (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Last Dollar (O) *Ford Mountain Rendezvous*  
 Lower Buzzworm (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Maze District trails: *Canyonlands National Park (K)*  
 Metal Masher (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Montello Mining District (E)  
 Mount Blanca (P)  
 Mount Antero (N)  
 Ophir Pass (O) *Ford Mountain Rendezvous*  
 Outer Limits (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Pictograph Wash (R) *Arizona State Association of 4-Wheel Drive Clubs' Jamboree*  
 Pittsburg Lake (G)  
 Pritchett Canyon (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Redington Pass (S)  
 River Trail (U) *Outback 4XAdventure*  
 RJ's Trail (Q)  
 Rocker Panel Pass (R) *Arizona State Association of 4-Wheel Drive Clubs' Jamboree*  
 Rodeo Drive (V) *Dakota Challenge*  
 Rubicon (B) *Early Broncos Rubicon Adventure, Jeepers' Jamboree, Jeep Jamboree, Toyota Rubithon...*  
 Salt Creek Canyon (I) \*\*\* Closed to all motorized use by Federal Judge, Summer, 1998 \*\*\*  
 Secret Spire (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Seven Mile Rim (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Sledgehammer (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Stair Way to Heaven (U) *Outback 4XAdventure*  
 Steel Bender (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Strike Ravine (H) *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari*  
 Sunbonnet Pass (C) *Johnson Valley OHV Area Fun in the Desert*  
 Surprise Canyon (D)  
 Terminator (R)  
 21 Road (M)  
 Valley of the Kings (G)  
 Waterfall (Q)  
 West Desert (F)  
 Woodpecker (R) *Arizona State Association of 4-Wheel Drive Clubs' Jamboree*  
 Wolf Run (T) *Southwest Four Wheel Drive Association-Las Cruces*

This list is in no way complete. These are the more famous trails in western America.

- 3-D (3) [3]
- Behind the Rocks (4+) [19]
- Behind the Rocks, Tip-Toe (3) [19a]
- Chicken Corners (2) [17]
- Cliff Hanger (3 1/2+) [14]
- Copper Ridge (3) [1]
- Crystal Geyser (3) [24]
- Dome Plateau (3) [25]
- Elephant Hill (3 1/2) [28]
- Fins & Things (3 1/2) [12]
- Flat Iron Mesa (4) [22]
- Golden Spike (4+) [9]
- Gold Bar Rim (3 1/2) [8]
- Hell's Revenge (4+) [11]
- Hellroaring Rim (3) [23]
- Hey Joe Canyon (3 1/2) [6]
- Hole in the Rock (4) [off map]
- Kane Creek Canyon (3 1/2) [20]
- Metal Masher (4) [7]
- Moab Rim (4+) [15]
- Poison Spider Mesa (3 1/2) [10]
- Porcupine Rim (3 1/2) [13]
- Pritchett Canyon (4+) [18]
- Rose Garden Hill (4) [27]
- Secret Spire (2 1/2) [2]
- Seven Mile Rim (3 1/2) [5]
- Steel Bender (3 1/2) [16]
- Strike Ravine (4) [21]
- Top of the World (3) [26]
- Wipe-Out Hill (4) [4]



Trail names are followed by the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers'* trail ratings. The bolded numbers relate to the locations on the map.



## SECTION 1

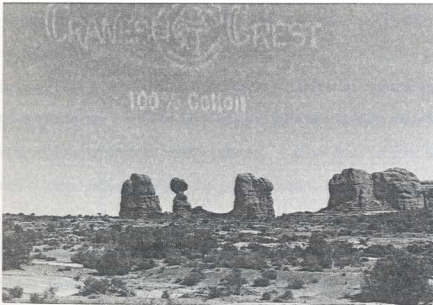
### VALUES & BELIEF: PERCEIVING THE LAND

I've always enjoyed nature. I feel very comfortable away from...modern society. I sort of feel like I've been placed out of time, that I should've been born in the late 1700's, early 1800's...part of the "old West." I feel more at home in the wilderness than in the cities.

—Quinn Mortensen, *Interview 1994*

Landscape...is an image of a place or area based upon some abstraction of reality, for it involves selection of certain elements as typical or significant.

—Richard V. Francaviglia, *The Mormon Landscape*



"Red Rock" spires viewed from a trail north-west of Moab, Utah.

## THE WEST: A SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE

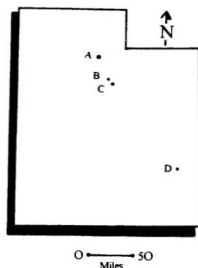
It's an escape. So from that point of view, we enjoy getting out there and just having a change of pace; we enjoy that. Another thing is...I like the Western United States, and the spaciousness, and the liberties that the space kind of gives you—something that you're not cooped in. And this gives you a feeling that you're, I guess, you're just free to the wind. (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996)

Rock Crawling culture was born following World War II. Veterans began buying surplus military Jeeps to test the driving skills they had acquired while driving these nimble vehicles during the war. These new skills were pushed and refined within the desert and mountain terrains surrounding their homes. Equally important was the fact that the rigs functioned as a means to take their families away from the burgeoning post-war urban world (Wilson, 89-115). 4-wheel drive vehicles provided an escape into the "outback," or the unpopulated desert and mountain spaces.

A fourth generation of drivers is beginning to build their own 4x4s, and now drives them on the trails that latice the western American topography. In the nineties very little has changed. Although the automotive industry has generated technology enabling drivers to pilot their vehicles over increasingly difficult trails, the community still ventures onto desert and mountain trails for the same reasons: to escape the urban environment, be with friends and family, see "a world of trees and streams,

rugged hills, meadows and mountains, deserts, and wetlands," and to test ones' driving skills on trails in these arduous locations (DeLong, 1996, ix).

Readers may question what places I refer to with the sweeping phrase, "the western American topography." The bulk of this research was carried out in Utah County, central Utah. Towns like Provo, Orem and American Fork, where many of my informants live, are located along the Wasatch Front (fig: 1.1). This is the foot of a range of the Rocky Mountains running north-south through the middle of the state. The mountains—which rise out of the high-desert topography—are capped by sheer rocky cliffs. Their bases are tessellated by stands of pine, aspen, scrub oak



**FIG: 1.1** Wasatch Front cities mentioned in this work are: A=Salt Lake City, B=American Fork, C= Provo & Orem. Not located along the Wasatch Front is Moab (D), a mecca for western rock crawling.

trees, and in some places, the sage brush that is ubiquitous to the desert expanses (figs: 1.2, 1.3). This vegetation competes for water running in streams that wind through the rocky valleys. Water plunging through these brooks and streams is icy-cold all year long, as it originates from snow melting from the peaks above, some of which reach 13,000 feet above sea level.

Yet, Rock Crawlers do not live solely in Utah County; nor are their expeditions relegated exclusively to trails winding through the high Rockies. Moab, a small town located in southern Utah, is a mecca for the Rock Crawling culture (fig: 1.1, F maps 1, 2). The trails in this vicinity--and others like them elsewhere--wind through a desert painted in hues of red, gold, yellow, caramel, and chocolate brown (figs: 1.4, 1.5). This landscape is replete with stone spires, arches, and all manner of other formations and landscapes that look as if they sprang from a scene in a *Road Runner and Coyote* cartoon. Rock Crawlers who frequent this locale live in places like Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, California, the Dakotas, and the other states comprising what is traditionally regarded as the West.

Landscapes that Rock Crawlers frequent in each of these states are often similar to the desert or mountain environments mentioned above. However, variances in the topography at each of these locations regularly draw drivers from the other states. In other words, these folks are highly mobile. For instance, in the mid-nineties excitement began to spread concerning a series of trails in South Dakota. They are extremely rocky, require exceptional driving skills, and a well-modified 4x4 to attempt them. An annual rock crawling event at these trails, known as *The Dakota Challenge*, attracts participants from as far as Texas.



FIG: 1.2 Utah's Rocky Mountains are covered with Aspen and Pine trees. (Courtesy Quinn Mortensen)

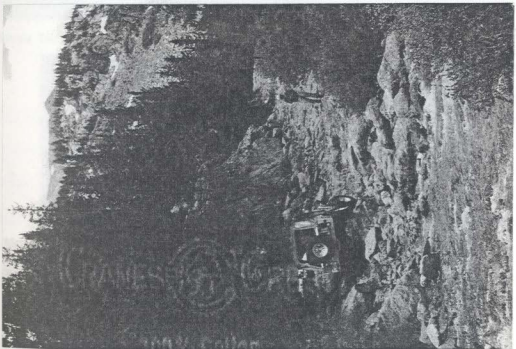


FIG: 1.3 Victor Mokler drives on the *Holy Cross* trail, in the mountains of Colorado. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)

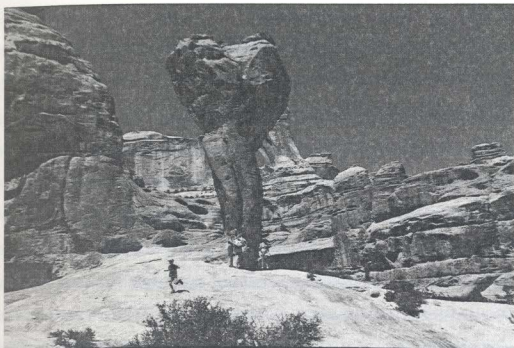


FIG: 1.4 Trail ride participants on the *Salt Creek* trail relax below the *Molar*, a sandstone “spire.”

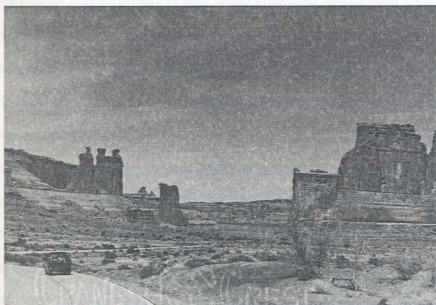


FIG: 1.5 The southern Utah desertscape in *Arches National Monument*, just a few miles north of Moab.

While conducting interviews for this project, I found Rock Crawlers consistently referring to 4-wheeling in these locations as a means to escape the pressures of the urban world. Thus, they imbue these lands with a symbolic nature. As "reactions to physical and psychological displacements caused by modernization, urbanization, and industrialization" (Blaustein, 266), the western American mountain and desert landscapes are transformed into places of "relaxation" and physical and spiritual freedom from the hub-bub of the work-a-day world (Victor Mokler, 1/21/1997). This rhetoric does not merely exemplify the convictions of weekend hobbyists, but is the driving force behind an entire lifestyle. The belief that the Western landscape offers these bounties is not without precedent, it has been observed that "many Americans still believe in the efficacy of what they define as the frontier experience" (Slatta, 192). For Rock Crawlers, the bounty offered by these western American spaces relates to their ability to provide recreational activities.

Thus we see that "landscapes and places do not have to be national centers of cultural attention or to have accreted a thick sediment of well-publicised history in order to be richly significant" (Ryden, 99). Rock Crawlers are not the only group prizing these areas; others also have interests and values dependent upon them. Many other recreation-oriented communities value them. Yet recreation is not the only boon offered by these lands. Individuals and corporations esteem them for the natural resources they contain, resources that can be extracted and converted into products and profit. Other groups, in reaction to those "using" the land, wish to preserve these locations, leaving them free from the desecrating influences of human and machine. These issues become sources of vehement contention

between the diverging groups involved.

Rock Crawlers, their world view, and their actions, must be placed within this broader cultural framework; general values regarding the nature and importance of the western landscape must be understood. This can only be accomplished by also studying perceptions of the physical environment held by the other communities prizing these lands. As such, a significant portion of this discussion is aimed at answering the nagging question: "what is the West?"

These different opinions indicate that "the West is just about anything that anyone has ever wanted it to be" (Worster, 20).<sup>1</sup> They also prove that "people tend to project their own feelings onto" the landscapes with which they interact (Ryden, 66).<sup>2</sup> Thus, due to these differing perceptions, the land itself has become a locus for contesting groups, each fighting to preserve their gestalt of these spaces because of the benefits they esteem.

The discussion will then focus on the Rock Crawling community's place as one of the groups vying for these spaces. Since the outback landscapes are a valuable commodity—due to their shrinking expanses as the urban world expands—people fight to preserve these places for their own image of how these places should be used, accessed, or left alone. Therefore, views concerning the physical environment not only affect how individuals access and use these lands, but how they interact with each other. As such, these tracts are intensely social places. That

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Aquila similarly notes that "the American West has long represented different things to different people" (1).

<sup>2</sup> See also: Wilson, 128.



is, cultures gather to enjoy and to defend them; they become a locus for interaction.

## MULTIPLE VIEWS OF THE WEST

There are multifarious gestalts concerning the western landscape, and more often than not they fail to agree. Discussing the many meanings applied to the American West, Richard Aquila has noted:

The West evokes numerous images in the American Mind. Foremost is the image of the mythic West as a Garden of Eden. There are several variations of this theme. Sometimes the West is described as a land of abundance and the source of economic, political, and social contentment. Other times the West appears as a land of opportunity, where one can achieve happiness, spiritual rejuvenation, equality, universal brotherhood, and social, religious, and individual freedom while living in a climate so healthy and vibrant as to dispel all doubts that the West must truly be God's country. (2)

His comments are important because they break down the *perceived* West into two basic criteria.

The first criteria refers to how the land is perceived; interestingly, the differing concepts regarding the land which Aquila notes can be superimposed over nearly any physical environment. That is, the bounties these spaces offer exist primarily in the minds of those interacting with them. In and of themselves these areas do not actually offer these rewards more than any other region. People see them as offering these things; as such they become culturally accepted truths. We have,

come to see that geographies of agriculture, leisure, and even wilderness are all cultural spaces, inscriptions on the land that are derived from and in turn shape our...ideas about [the West]. (Wilson, 257)

Aquila's second point is that different people perceive the land differently; that is, it offers different bounties to different people. Some view the open spaces as offering personal liberty and solace; others see monetary gain. Still others view these lands as being Eden-like, undefiled by the masses inherent to the urban world.

Understanding these differing perspectives is important because they did not fade with the passing of the frontier era. Individuals holding these traditional views fall into three broad criteria: *extraction* groups, *recreational* groups, and *preservation* groups. *Extractors*, discussed first, are comprised of communities valuing the West's land for its extractable resources. As with the other groups, the breadth of individuals falling under this nomenclature is large. Farmers and ranchers are lumped together with large multi-national conglomerates such as Utah's *Kennekott Copper Mining* company and its diverse subsidiaries. Likewise, oil and gas drilling interests, as well as lumbering, are represented. Each falls under this heading because the premise driving these communities is that the land offers extractable resources that can be used and/or marketed. Whether it be fields of wheat, orchards laden with fruit, expanses used for grazing sheep, or mile-deep mines, the driving assumption remains the same. Each makes use of the land to convert it to marketable and/or profitable goods.

*Recreationalists*, like extraction-based communities, are a disparate group. Hikers, campers, and windsurfers can essentially be discussed in the same vein as motocross enthusiasts,<sup>3</sup> horseback riders, and Rock Crawlers. The common thread

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<sup>3</sup> Motocross is defined as "competitive or aggressive off-road motorcycle riding...racing over or around obstacles" (David Mosher, 12/10/1997). It has also been

linking these groups is that they operate with the notion that the West's lands "provide an unusual source of...rehabilitation and recreation for our general population" (Randy Robinson, 9/21/1997). Leisure provided by these locations is pleasurable because it provides escape, excitement, and beautiful surroundings. Because Rock Crawlers fall into the recreational group, more space will be devoted to a discussion of their perceptions.

*Preservation* communities are equally as diverse as those working from the extraction and recreational viewpoints. Yet they are motivated by the concern that today's expanding urban sphere--and its accompanying extraction and recreational communities--are vanquishing the remaining tracts of wild western lands. Prizing these spaces for their ability to let "the forces of nature prevail," preservationists are committed to fight as voices for these shrinking lands (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997). Thus, they seek to protect back country areas from destruction wreaked by humans and the mechanical objects they utilize to access non-urbanized locations.

At least one other (fourth) set exists, these are those who perceive the West's spaces as locations for illicit activities. These communities are characterized as those seeing the Western expanses as lawless locations, places for breaking cultural standards and taboos. One such group are youths who use mountain and desert locations for illicit activities: under-aged drinking, drug abuse, and amorous activities not approved by mainstream society. These spaces, then, provide a

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described as: "Riding competitively with others across all types of terrain" (David Mosher, 12/12/1997). The motorcycle races where the riders, clad in brightly colored protective gear, fly high over berms and jumps are one aspect of this sport.

chance to escape authority figures or the pressure to act in certain prescribed ways exerted by forces within "decent" society.

Other instances of illicit activities can be found near my in-laws' home. They live at the edge of Utah's "West Desert," several miles south-west from Lehi, Utah, the closest town (F map 1). In this desert milieu, it is not uncommon to routinely see hunters and campers. It is also common to find the bodies of murder victims.<sup>4</sup> My father-in-law has been on the scene to recover victims from at least three different murders, one of which he found.

The desert, then, exists to some as a location for counter-hegemonic, secret, or heinous activities. It is, to them, a place where these endeavors can be played-out. Although murder is a far cry from teenage drinking, the motivational perception to use this location for such an activity is much the same. To them, desert and mountain locations are places of counter-cultural activity, places to escape authority, places for activity not approved or endorsed by mainstream society.

I do not discuss these people because they are not part of a mainstream social movement. (Although this area of study is intriguing.) The following discussion is relegated purely to those communities currently vying publicly for access to the West's open lands. And, as yet, no group of partying teens, mafia hit-men, serial murderers, or clandestine midnight toxic waste dumpers has publicly argued their right to regularly access these areas for their activities.

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<sup>4</sup> The bodies of seven young women were found in the deserts of Utah during 1997. Several of these are believed to be the victims of a serial murderer. Ted Bundy, one of America's most monstrous serial murderers, used desert locations in Utah to both perpetrate his crimes, and to hide evidence.

Each of the above groups has its own "West." Diverging approaches to the land by these communities reveal contradicting perspectives of what the land itself represents, and where its value lies for each community.<sup>5</sup> As such, each group's "experience of [these] place[s] is inevitably a product and expression of the [group] whose experience it is, and therefore, unavoidably, the nature of that experience...is shaped at every turn by the personal and social biograph[ies] of [those] sustain[ing] it" (Basso, 1996, 55). In other words, these locations represent what their users "enable them to say" (56).<sup>6</sup> They are "complex constructions of social histories, personal and interpersonal experiences, and selective memory" (Kahn, 167).

These diverging notions regarding the physical environment lead to a "fluidity" in the terms referring to these places (Pocius, personal communication). Fluidity refers to the slippery and changing values associated with vocabulary used regularly by the communities being discussed. That is, although several different communities may discuss the same tracts of land, their conceptualizations of what these places represent, and the lexicon they use to describe them, may differ radically. Thus, the primary issue at hand involves the varying terminologies applied to the same back country landscape(s).

Publicly owned spaces extend over and through the western states. These expanses are owned or managed either by the federal government, or by the states in which they are located. The importance of these expanses is that they are

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the clashing inherent to one instance of differing landscape gestalts, see: Erika Brady, 138-51.

<sup>6</sup> See also: Kahn, 188; Stewart, 138-9; Tuan, 1990, 13.

available to the public for a variety of uses (Wilson, 228). Federal and state governments have deemed many of them *unimproved land*. This designation refers to the fact that the land has not been developed, cultivated or otherwise "domesticated" (Knobloch, 75-7). Those procuring or using such locations "for improving upon [them], and bringing [their] latent potentialities into being through certain kinds of work," regularly utilize this nomenclature (75).

These same spaces are called the *outback* by Rock Crawlers. Along with several other recreation-based communities, like mountain bikers, Rock Crawlers also refer to these places as the *back country*. But the outback also bears other names, and is considered important for other reasons. Preservationist organizations and communities designate these same locations with the name *wilderness*—this name also has a political significance which we will discuss later. As previously noted, the perception and nomenclature of such spaces by these communities is "directed by cultural values" (Tuan, 1990, 12).

Readers should note that each of these terms is a reflection of the value placed upon the land by the community using that specific expression (Ryden, 94-5). That is, extractors view the land as *unimproved*: as if it is waiting to be utilized; recreational groups see the land as *outback* or *back country*: an Other, away, place that is removed from normal life. Preservationist groups value these locations as *wilderness*, connotations hinging on a lack of interaction with the human element.

## EXTRACTION-BASED COMMUNITIES

Groups falling into the extraction categories are widely diverse, and include such communities as: farmers, ranchers, mining operations, lumbering, and many other communities who “work” the land. The commonality between these disparate groups is that the landscape is valued by them as a resource for the production of products and/or profit (Jackson, 44).<sup>7</sup>

Farmers are one of the first—and least threatening—groups that comes to mind when many people think about those who work with the land. One well-known Utah farmer is Reid Wayman, a past president of the *Utah Farm Bureau*.<sup>8</sup> Reid notes that he has “been involved—engaged in—fruit farming all [his] adult life” (10/1/1997). Thus, he has a wealth of experiences from which to pull when speaking about farming. His comments provide a window into the farming mindset.

During an interview, Reid discussed how he came to choose the location and type of farm that he ran for many years. He began by noting the preceding sale of a farm that he had shared with his brother; at this point he had to decide what he was going to do next:

I wasn't ready to retire, and I've always been fascinated by the concept of a “pick your own,” where people could come out and harvest their own fruit—save themselves a little money—and have an

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<sup>7</sup> For an important consideration of extraction-based communities and the use of public lands see David Warner's, “Expanding the Wilderness: Businesses Seek A More Balanced Approach to Restricting Public Lands.”

<sup>8</sup> Reid is also my father-in-law. Consequently, I have had many years to watch him work his farm.

experience that would be one that they would remember. And this opportunity came up after searching quite thoroughly for a place that we could do this sort of a thing. (10/1/1997)

The statement that he was not yet "ready to retire" is interesting. It reveals that farming was (quite obviously) his occupation; by extension, therefore, his workplace was the land that comprised his farm. Thus, this space was a place of business. He continues, noting that he wanted to start a "pick your own" farm that would provide his patrons with a specific experience. Creating the right experience for his customers was integral to the success of his plan.

Viewing the land as an integral part of his business plan, Reid was pragmatic about the location of his undertaking. The placement had to fulfill specific criteria to work towards its fulfilment as a functioning business venture:

A "pick your own" needs two or three things. You need easy access; you need paved roads. Experience would say that if you live within thirty miles of a metropolitan area of sixty to seventy-thousand people that you can in fact establish a pick-your-own and make it successful. *This particular ground had all of those criteria which would make it favorable.* (10/1/1997, italics added)

To function as a healthy "pick your own" operation, Reid's farm had to be located in a user-friendly location (fig: 1.6). Not unlike the proper placement of any retail establishment, this new farm had to be situated where patrons could see it, and visit it. The visibility of this location differed from that of his previous farm, which wholesaled fruit and did not depend upon being in the public eye.

To bring more attention to his "pick your own" farm Reid built a large eagle (6' wingspan) and a large buffalo (8' tall) out of leaf springs (figs: 1.7, 1.8). The eagle sits perched on an arch over the driveway entrance and the buffalo stands





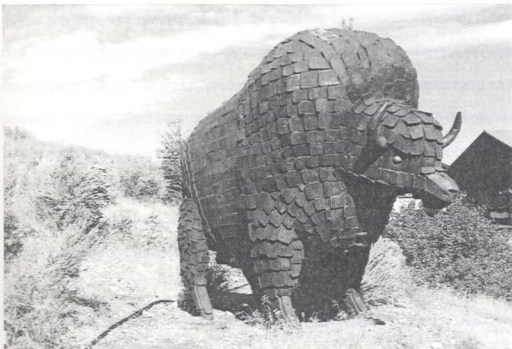
**FIG: 1.6** Reid Wayman's farm runs parallel to the west shore of Utah Lake. On the lake's opposite side are Provo, Orem, and American Fork. It is a fifteen to thirty-minute drive to the farm from these different towns.

next to the same entrance. He wanted his farm to stand-out as a "landmark" in the minds of anyone passing by on the road. In fact, many travellers, wanting to meet the builder of these sculptures, regularly drive up his long driveway to inquire about their artisan. Not only do they get a chance to meet Reid, but they usually also purchase fruit. Many people along the Wasatch Front mountain range know of his farm due to of these sculptures.

Other criteria besides visibility had to be filled for the new farm to be a success in Reid's estimation. These factors are considered scientifically to determine what land is capable of sustaining plant life capable of bearing the highest yield:



**FIG: 1.7** With a six foot wingspan, this eagle, constructed of automotive leafsprings, announces Reid's farm.



**FIG: 1.8** This eight foot tall buffalo, also built with leafsprings, helps to proclaim the farm.

Even more important than that was the fact that we were on the side of the hill here above Utah Lake. Utah Lake acts as a radiator in the spring and water temperatures don't vary as much as the ground temperatures do and so we would more often than not get inversions in the spring, where--the warmer water than the land--the warm air would rise up from the lake and form an inversion over the orchard and provide frost protection in the spring. Which of course is highly essential. The soil was good; the drainage was good. It appeared like the water was good. (10/1/1997)

As discussed above, the earth upon which the farm was to be situated had to be evaluated also. Air temperature is a factor that can be affected by the lay of the land; and in Reid's case, the large body of water located near-by. These factors were considered in the decision to choose the farm's location.<sup>9</sup> The quality of the soil was also a component mentioned by Reid.

As is obvious from Reid's remarks, the land was considered in multiple ways before the farm was undertaken. These were important decisions which needed consideration before opening the new enterprise. Like other commercial ventures, considerable money is at stake: "you've got to have financial backing to carry on an operation like this" (Reid Wayman, 10/1/1997). A wrong calculation in the planning stages could mean an unprofitable venture. Absent is the nostalgia concerning the landscape that is commonly held by those living in large urban centers (Wilson, 195).<sup>10</sup> For Reid, the land is how he makes his living; it is considered as an integral part of the farming business.

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson notes that "modern agriculture as practised since the Second World War is the result of applying industrial methods to traditional farming practices" (194).

<sup>10</sup> For a book-length study of "country" nostalgia vs. the reality of "country" life, see: Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*.

An interesting conclusion to the discussion of Reid and his farm is that the vast majority of his farm was sold to a land developer when he decided to retire. As I write these words, the orderly rows of trees that once comprised his farm are being uprooted to make-way for a housing development (fig: 1.6). Although sad to see them go, Reid states that he sold the land to provide retirement funds for his wife and himself. Thus the land continues to provide his family with resources.

During a visit to my parents' home in Boston, I discussed cultural landscapes with my father. I noted an interest in the layout of farmers' fields because they "are a unique type of vernacular art" (Mchenry, 107-8). My father, raised on a combined dairy and tobacco farm in Providence, North Carolina, replied that "economy" often dictated these patterns (James Neal, 5/1997). He furthered this assertion, stating that by economy he meant that field layout is regularly affected through a combination of: a desire to use the quickest, most time-efficient means, while also keeping production cost-effective. Also affecting field layouts is the accessibility of the land and the format most likely to yield a high return on one's efforts.

The rhetoric used to describe this process sounds very much like a business plan. And the points addressed by my father illustrate the business-like manner by which the farmers in the southern states, where he grew up, approach their fields. Each step was carefully considered as an integral element towards producing a high-yield crop with a minimum of wasted time and energy. As with any successful business, efficiency was a primary guiding rule on the Neal family farm, as it is with the farms in Utah Valley, Utah.

Discussions with Boise Evans, a long-time farmer and rancher who lives

several miles north of Reid Wayman's farm, supported this. That is, his discussion of valuable land for grazing (denoted "pasture" by him) used a similar means for evaluating the worth of a tract of land: its productivity. The question: "As far as grazing is concerned, what's the difference between a good tract of land and a bad tract of land?" elicited a conversation about the productivity of a pasture:

Boise: Well, there's quite a variation. You take the land that's wet meadow, it feeds as high as two heads an acre. But if you take that dry land like out where Reid is there, in that area they probably wouldn't run one [head] to ten acres. So there's quite a bit--there's a lot of variation in it.

David: So you have to consider how many cattle are going to be on the land and how productive that plot is?

Boise: That's right. We learned--after a year or so--we figured out how many [cattle] it'll run.

David: O.K. And what areas are the best around here? In that ...[area where your cattle currently are]?

Boise: Those [location]s are real good, they are some wet sprinkled pastures, yes, they are *real* good. And then we have some in here that aren't too bad. They're kind of in-between. Now you take that down around Saratoga there, just north of Reid there, and that's mostly winter pasture. And you might run--winter--oh, one to the acre. Between half a cow to the acre.

Boise also showed me the platte for a large subdivision that will be built on what he called "waste land" and "mediocre property" that was pasture for his cattle. "We didn't have water rights, so you couldn't irrigate it...it was poor soil...it only supported a few head of cattle" (10/8/1997). He noted that most of his other lands were more productive and that the space set-apart for the up-coming neighborhoods "barely paid the taxes for itself" (10/8/1997).

Commenting on why he decided to turn his energies from farming to land

development, Boise noted: "It's gotten so you can't hardly break even any more; only the big farms like in Canada and the Mid-West can do it these days" (10/8/1997). He estimates that he and his siblings will each net "two million" from the sale, and added that he has a brother in "southern Utah starting with a cattle ranch. This deal will probably save his cattle" (10/8/1997). It will also help Boise and his family to "finally have some money before I die" (10/8/1997).

Boise breaks the ability to make the land productive down; "You've got to have vision...So many people have tunnel vision, they just do what they know--what they were raised with. But there's other ways to make a profit from the land" (10/8/1997). He elaborated on a plan to turn some of his property in southern Idaho, which does not have a high resale value, into a "hunting operation." It will have a bed and breakfast, trout ponds, "a place to shoot birds," and even special property designated for elk hunting. A special herd will even be maintained for this purpose. He will soon have financial backing, and believes that he will swiftly turn a better profit than the land ever could have provided during its days as a farm.

But farming and ranching are not the only ways of utilizing the land for products or profit. Mining is another extraction-based activity. Richard Phelps, a retired employee of *Kennecott Copper*—the world's largest open-pit mine—spoke with me about the workings of the facility, located in the mountains south-west of Salt Lake City. For *Kennecott Copper*, the land provides a source for marketable products. Richard noted that the company's goal is "to recover the minerals that are out there in that area—at a profit—in a manner that is environmentally responsible" (2/12/1998). These minerals include gold, silver, various other trace elements, and

"copper is the big one...the big income is from the copper" (2/12/1998).

To accomplish this goal, the company "use[s] the latest techniques and they try to squeeze every dollar's worth of value out of the material that they can, so that they can stay profitable and share it with their stock holders and employees" (Richard Phelps, 2/12/1998). While discussing how the company views the lands they own and work, Richard noted: "Well, they realize that they can't waste anything because that's their bread and butter. They've got to mine it very efficiently, without any waste. They've got to take very good care of it" (2/12/1998). I asked Richard "what makes a parcel of land more valuable or less valuable, as far as the corporation is concerned?" His answer reflected the pragmatic approach taken by the company.

Well, the mineral is in pockets here and there. It isn't spread evenly throughout the mountain. So they look for the areas where it is a higher grade. Because the low-grade areas--they can't extract it and run it through the processes and make a profit. It's too expensive. So they go into the areas where there is--though there may be small amounts of ore scattered in many locations, they have to go into those areas where it is most valuable. If the ore grade is too low, they can't operate in those areas. They have to be selective. Pick those that the current market price of the minerals will justify the process and cost of extracting and refining the minerals. (2/12/1998)

Although mining is often perceived in less a romanticised manner than is farming or ranching, interaction with the land is based upon similar motivations. That is, to interact in such a way with the land so as to produce a product and/or profit. Interestingly, Richard repeatedly noted the steps taken by *Kennecott Copper* to care for the lands they own. He discussed the clean-up and beautification of past facilities, "to make them look just like Mother Nature had not been changed"

(2/12/1998). He also noted that the company "goes beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of the law" regarding the care taken for properly maintaining currently working projects and for the environmental restoration of past project areas (2/12/1998). This, he said, "goes beyond public relations, its part of being part of the community" (2/12/1998).

The extraction mindset is similar, no matter what the group. Each is comprised of those individuals who, through usage and interaction with the land, are able to extract its resources. These resources need not be food-related. They can also be in the form of other raw materials, such as petro-products or minerals. It is important not to limit the scope of what is labelled as a "product" because as Boise argues, "vision" is all that is required to transform a plot into a marketable landscape. For instance, both Reid Wayman and Boise Evens have marketed their properties as recreational landscapes. Reid sought to provide "an experience" with his pick-your-own operation, and Boise is currently gearing-up to provide an "outdoor experience" for hunters from as far as "New York" (10/8/1997).

## **RECREATIONAL COMMUNITIES**

Recreational communities are those groups who interact with the landscape for its diversionary aspects. These groups could include, among others: horseback riders, hikers, campers, rock climbers, skiers, and mountain bikers. Also included in this group are those who use motorized equipment to mediate their interaction with the landscape. This list includes communities such as: motorcyclists, off-



roaders (Rock Crawlers and other 4x4 users), water-craft enthusiasts, and snowmobilers. As is readily evident, these groups are disparate; at first glance little might seem common between them, other than similar locations for their activities. However, there is more to their similarity than that. They also have parallel aesthetics regarding the land.

In contrast to those perceiving the physical environment as a location for the extraction of profit, most recreation-oriented communities interact with these places as a refuge. For these groups, the expanses of land "have...the effect of setting people free" (Worster, 84); they have been described as "spaciousness, and the liberties that the space kind of gives you" (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). That is, the back country is entered as a place of relaxation, fun, and escape. Essentially, these locations are perceived, and interacted with, as zones that are antithetical to the world in which the enthusiasts regularly live. Thus, wilderness, or back country places, are valued as "the place of the 'other' in the landscape" (Wilson, 181). So, their aesthetic is based upon the ability for the landscape to transport ones' mind and thoughts to a different place. A key to understanding recreational approaches to the landscape rests in this aesthetic.

Jay Appleton's function-oriented *Prospect-Refuge* theory, although not explicitly dealing with sport or recreation, helps to explicate the perceptual responses of these groups as they interact with their recreational landscape (1990, 1996). This theory divides such interaction into three "bio-physiological bases" (Bale, 122), *prospect*, *refuge*, and *hazard* (Appleton, 1990, 25-6). *Prospects* are vistas, or a topographic milieu instrumental for procuring a good view; *refuges* are conditions

conducive to hiding or sheltering" (Bale, 122).<sup>11</sup> *Hazards*, on the other hand, have been described as "all those sources of danger which it might be necessary to avoid by whatever means" (Appleton, 25). However, in terms of recreation, this description of danger sensation is too narrow. From the recreational perspective, placing oneself in danger, pushing the boundaries, "feeling the need for speed," is part and parcel of many contemporary activities (Cailliois, 23-6). The back country provides a means for such thrills.

Rock Crawlers routinely discuss their outback experiences in these terms. For instance, in reply to the question "Why do you go 4-wheeling?" Randy Robinson, an avid Rock Crawler and back country explorer, commented:

You know, really, I don't think it's so much the adventure aspect anymore, *the living-on-the-edge kind of thing that comes with trying to overcome some of the off-road obstacles that we do*. That is, that does have...some of the attraction, but we go because this really is the *only way you can get in to see and enjoy some of the areas we love so much*. We go now--when my family goes on a off-roading activity--we enjoy the climbing, and hiking, and seeing new things, aspect of the 4-wheeling as much as we do the getting-there. We enjoy the being there probably more now.

Every time we go into the back country, especially when we are talking about areas around the Colorado Plateau [southern Utah vicinity] *we run into the new incredible things that you can only experience if you can get into those areas*. Most of the areas we've been into off-roading in the last few years, we would never have seen if we had to walk into them. My wife isn't in very good health; she'll be fifty in three or four years...she's born [8] children, she's just not in the kind of physical condition that would allow her to carry a forty-pound pack. And not only that, she doesn't want to. If she could, she just doesn't have the physical...stamina to do it. But she still enjoys *seeing these wild places, and seeing the petroglyphs and pictographs and incredible rock formations, and the vistas*. And you can't, you can't access that country unless you can drive in....My kids--right now--if I

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<sup>11</sup> See also: Appleton, 1996, 63-7.

gave them the choice of Moab or Hawaii, I think would go to Moab.  
(9/21/1997, italics added)

Randy's answer discusses why he goes 4-wheeling through these three means of viewing the outback. Immediately, he comments that he no longer goes to the back country solely for the thrill, the hazards involved. He then focuses upon benefits available through outback exploration: "new and incredible things," and the activities that his family undertakes. Although this is not overtly a discussion of the refuge properties offered by the lands, the idea that these locations offer bounties unavailable in the work-a-day world is implicit to his argument. These assumptions grow from the refuge, outback as Other, perspective. Much of the rest of Randy's comments focus on the "vistas" ubiquitous to the outback.

It is important for readers to gain a more in-depth understanding of these three motivations. Therefore, each is discussed below. Comments from several other recreational groups are co-mingled with those of Rock Crawlers: mountain bikers, hikers, campers, etc... This is because Rock Crawlers are but one of the many recreational communities sharing a similar aesthetic concerning these places.

### Outback As Prospect

There are some sports and recreational activities for which environment is fairly unimportant; these focus upon "body movement [for its]...own sake" (Appleton, 1996, 157). Running track and football, for instance, are judged primarily for their

ability to exemplify a mastery of certain physical skills, rather than for the quality of the landscape in which they occur. However, there are other activities for which the "environmental condition, situation, [and] arrangement [need to be] conducive to the attainment of a view" to make the process complete (Appleton, 1996, 262). Rock crawling is one of these.

For these activities, the environment in which one seeks recreation is an inseparable factor in the over-all experience. The *prosect* of new, different, or exciting views of one's surrounding environment is imperative. For instance, note how important the setting is to this description of a back country rock crawling trip:

I just love it when a plan comes together! The trip was perfect, and I mean perfect. The weather was simply ideal, as only those special days of autumn can bring. The companions were congenial, as only four-wheelers everywhere tend to be, and the setting...oh, the setting. The maze of southeastern Utah is truly one of the most dramatic and awe-inspiring landscapes to be found anywhere...We travelled over 240 miles of some of the most scenic back country trails available to the intrepid four-wheeler with an appetite to get way, way off the beaten track. (Werkmeister, 1993, 60)

Imagine planning to go on a camping trip in a slag heap, where the only view is comprised of the gravel and tailings thrust up from a local mine. Such a situation is laughable only because exceptional views of "geographical grandeur" are integral to the traditional camping aesthetic (West, 274). A camping trip without these great views would be a failure.

I like to go hiking...because it's beautiful, it's spiritual...there is something about being up in the mountains--accomplishing, getting to the top. Like, it was *hell* to get up there, but when you're on top it's the *ultimate*...You can look out and feel maybe kind of the way God feels. You can see everything. (Amy Eskridge, 8/6/1997)

Other enthusiasts mention different types of pleasing views: "I love the cleanness,

the cleanness, the pristine rivers" (Cherri Eskridge, 8/6/1997). Of his mountain biking experiences, Jim Caldwell notes that he likes "seeing the sights" (10/13/1997).

The "sights," and seeing expanses is an essential part of this aesthetic. The sky often fits into this dynamic as well. It is interesting that so many campers mention "being able to see the stars. Being away from the city and its lights I could see more stars than I've ever seen" (Holly Neal, 8/2/1997). Such assertions bolster the assertion that specific activities depend upon a view for completion.

Skiing and snow boarding also depend upon *prospect*. It is true that these sports focus upon one's personal skill level and/or pursuing a sensation of speed, but a significant portion of the experience can be attributed to the alpine setting. "Probably some of the satisfaction of [these recreations] could be experienced on a featureless inclined surface, but the satisfaction is greatly enhanced by the environment [where] it takes place" (Appleton, 1996, 158). The snow draped mountain panorama seen from a summit is something no artificial setting can achieve. Moving down the mountainside, participants often stop to appreciate these expansive vistas.<sup>12</sup> Progressing further along, skiers move through a world visually Other than that in which they normally interact.

Rock Crawling, as well as many other off-road motorsports, depends upon the same visual dynamic. Participants, trying to describe what they have seen, often note these views with sweeping statements. For instance, the visual splendors afforded by a trail in southern Utah have been described as: "The maze [area] of

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<sup>12</sup> For more on panoramas, see: Appleton, 1996, 77.

southeastern Utah is truly one of the most dramatic and awe-inspiring landscapes to be found anywhere" (Werkmeister, 1993, 60). Many drivers stop during trail rides, taking photos of the surrounding views, "idealiz[ing each of them] into a setting of unalloyed beauty" (West, 271).

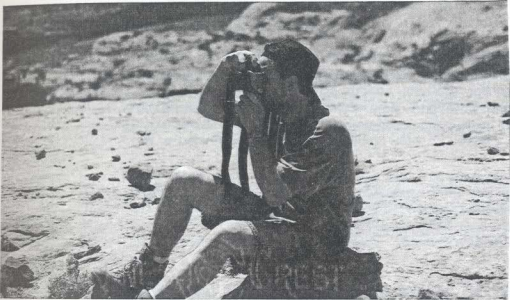


FIG: 1.9 Quinn Mortensen stops to take a photo of the topography during a trail ride near Moab, Utah.

Discussing one of the reasons why he goes 4-wheeling, Matt Smith, an avid

Rock Crawler, asserts:

In terms of historical perspective--and that's certainly something else that you get to see as a 4-wheeler here in Utah--we get to see a lot of Navajo Indian ruins and things of that nature. I took a trip to lake *Powell on the Mormon Pioneer Trail, Hole in the Rock*. Got to see some pretty incredible things down there. A lot of **slickrock**\* there as well. And just--to have a vehicle that can take you out in the middle of *the most* desolate land, to experience the beauty of the forbidding desert--to be able to return unscathed is quite an enjoyable experience, I think. (4/4/1996)

It is important to note how much of Matt's statement focuses upon the visual aspects of his experience.<sup>13</sup> This is because a great part of rock crawling events depend upon the prospect of pleasures offered by the surrounding landscape (figs: 1.10-1.15).

Matt is not alone, other Rock Crawlers routinely make similar assertions concerning the environment in which they 4-wheel:

I like to go up to the old mines and ghost towns. Or stuff like down in Moab, the pretty—the slickrock, you know? We went down through the *Doll House*, *Canyonlands*, *Arches*, all those national parks. You can see all that down in the Moab area. And then go into the desert and see all the flowers, and up *American Fork Canyon* it's really pretty, especially in the Spring. (Shannon Shirk, 4/21/1996)

*Poison Spider Mesa*...[is] a very beautiful trail. You get a lot of different sights that you can see from the trail because of the way it's laid out on the plateau. *Locally*, I like *American Fork Canyon* because of the topography: the cliffs that are up there, the abundant trees and forest, the fact that usually you are near water. (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996)

I totally love...*Sierra Trek*, in Tahoe [California]. It's not necessarily the hardest, but it's just in a high alpine setting. And I like alpine settings. And you traverse *Fordyce Creek* several times, and the water's up past your running board often times. And you're thinking: "Am I going to sink or swim?" <<Laughs>>

You get out there like in Moab [Utah]...For example...you got the *Lasal* mountains there, and they're up there several—I don't know—10,000 feet. They're white and snow-capped, and you come down and you've got the green surfaces that are coming into the Spring bloom, and you get into the red rock, and you get the desert flowers—and you look at those contrasts and it's *absolutely* beautiful. I just lose myself out there, *totally* lose myself out there! (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996)

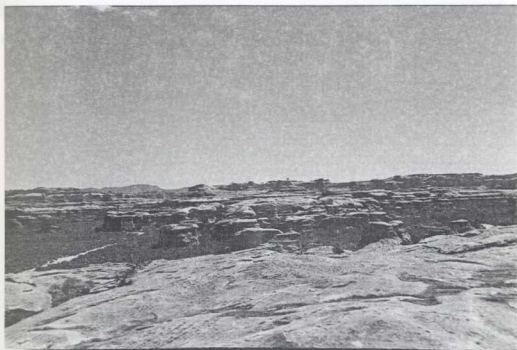
It is not difficult to find information supporting the notion that many

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<sup>13</sup> Matt also attaches these visual aspects with the important concept of history, the ideas of history or heritage will be discussed later in this chapter.



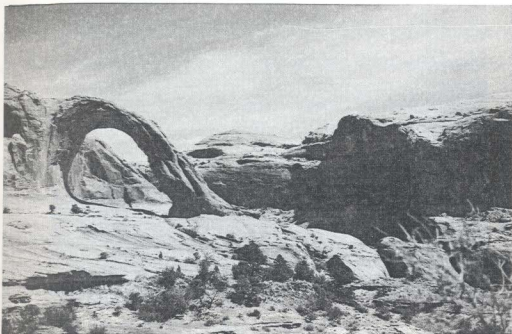
**FIG: 1.10** A small group of Rock Crawlers enjoy a quiet lunch atop the Rocky Mountains of central Utah.



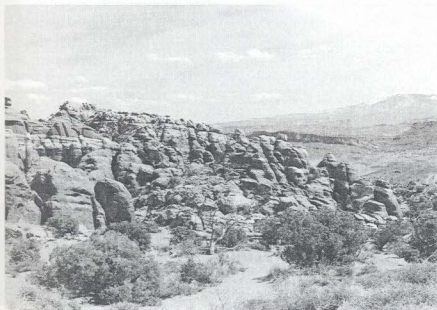
**FIG: 1.11** Colorful slickrock formations grace the foreground while the La Sal mountains rise in the background. Notice the trail crossing the sage-covered desert floor at the photo's left.

**FIG: 1.12** This photograph is a composite of two photos taken at the same location.

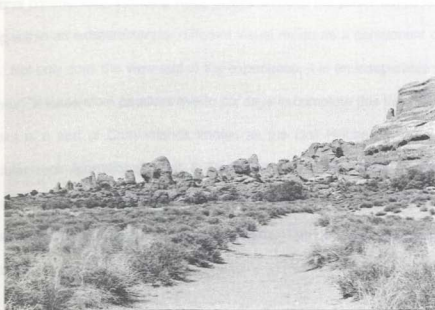




**FIG: 1.12** This arch--located north-west of Moab, Utah--is one of many in that area.



**FIG: 1.13** Oddly shaped stone formations highlight the views of many trails in southern Utah.



**FIG: 1.14** A trail heads towards a series of sandstone “goblins” near Moab, Utah.



**FIG: 1.15** Huge stone monoliths rise out of the desert on the *Seven Mile Rim* trail, near Moab, Utah.

recreational communities—including Rock Crawlers—need the possibility of enjoying or being within an extraordinary or different visual milieu as a component of their activity. Not only does the view add to the experience, it is an inseparable part of the activity: "It takes most paddlers five to six days to complete this trip. The trip's high point is a part of Canyonlands known as the Doll House, an area full of spectacular rock formations" (Belt & Davis, 87). In fact, these recreational experiences would not be complete without the prospect of good views. But good views are not the sole component to these activities. The perception of refuge also plays its part.

### Outback As Refuge

When applied to the landscape, the term *refuge* refers to the perception of these places as "concealment" (Appleton, 1996, 64), a location "conducive to hiding or sheltering" (Bale, 122). Thus, in the recreational mind-set, the western topography becomes a location for escape.<sup>14</sup> For recreationalists, the recreation-oriented landscape is not merely physically removed from the work-a-day world; it also withdraws them mentally from that sphere. These experiences "not only provide...temporary escape from life's problems, but [they teach] Americans how to cope with reality" (Aquila, 10). Escape provided by the outback experience works

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Nash Smith asserts that the West has traditionally been perceived as a "refuge of the oppressed"(203).

like a salve, healing areas that were previously exposed to caustic substances.<sup>15</sup>

While in the back country, recreationalists don't think about "all my responsibilities at work. Having to pay bills and worry about--you know--traffic...you get away from all the stresses and strains of daily life in a modern city" (Jim Broadbent, 4/21/1997). Important to the recreational notion of refuge is the role of "the landscape in enhancing [this escapist] experience" (Bale, 123).<sup>16</sup>

Rock crawling is often discussed in this light: "I love going back into the mountains and I can get back into very remote places...quickly and easily" (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996). For Matt Smith, "remote places" are far from the daily routine, and the crowded world of the urban sphere; he continues: "One of the things that I feel strongly about is getting out into the out-of-doors. For me its a rather Zen-like experience. It's a personal experience" (fig. 1.16)

Other Rock Crawlers share Matt's feelings. They note that back country adventures are also chances to enjoy these places with one's family and friends:

It's a recreational activity that can be done as a family unit. 4-wheeling is *something that gets you to an area of the country that would be somewhat isolated, away from the hustle and bustle of a big city*. 4-wheeling and off-road adventuring gives you a thrill that not everybody has an opportunity to experience. There are places in south-east Utah that I'm sure that you and I could go, if we were willing to spend a week camping out of the back of a Jeep, and possibly not see another vehicle or another person for a week's period of time. (Chip Brox,

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<sup>15</sup> Along with the idea of escape comes that of healing. "As a place the West was not only beautiful but magically healing" (West, 274). Withdrawing mentally from the work-a-day world allows one's mind to recuperate.

<sup>16</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck notes that the southwest was less the discovery of an existing landscape than an "invention" of a "fictive" one which lends itself easily to escapism and leisure activities (95-6).

4/7/1996, italics added)

Allan Olsen echoes these feelings, explaining that he takes his family 4-



**FIG: 1.16** Huge expanses with no visible urban areas, like this one north of Moab, foster the notion of escape.

wheeling "because [they] enjoy driving the trails, taking the challenge, to see what the vehicle will do. *Get away from urban life*" (4/12/1996, italics added). During the course of the conversation he mentioned escaping urban life several times. Another Rock Crawler, Quinn Mortensen, breaks 4-wheeling down to its most basic component: "Its escapism from the daily grind" (4/21/1996). It is common for recreationalists to note the ability for the land to transport them away from the "hustle and bustle:"

I've always enjoyed nature. I feel very comfortable away from... modern society. I sort of feel like I've been placed out of time, that I

should've been born in the late 1700's, early 1800's...part of the "old West." I feel more at home in the wilderness than in the cities. Even though I was raised in Los Angeles—in downtown Los Angeles—I like getting away from people. I don't know if being raised in Los Angeles made me...dislike crowds or what. I don't like going any place where it's crowded. (Quinn Mortensen, 5/11/1993)<sup>17</sup>

Biking in the mountains also presents the chance to slip free from the pressures of the work-a-day hustle and bustle: "I go mountain biking in *Provo Canyon* at lunch with a couple of buddies. It's a chance to get some exercise, and get away from the crap at work...It's a chance to relax" (Jim Caldwell, 7/1997). Other recreationalists—like hikers—mention escaping "the phone, people, jobs, duties, the routine" (Cherri Eskridge, 8/6/1997).

An integral part of the *refuge* aesthetic relies on the land's ability to offer enthusiasts a physical removal from the confines of their normal existence. This removal, or the chance to "get way, way off the beaten track" (Werkmeister, 1993, 60), and have "quiet time" is a strong motivator (Amy Eskridge, 8/6/1997). Campers often refer to their trips into the back country as "a chance to get away...by myself" (Holly Neal, 8/2/1997). Or "I like getting away from people and I like being by myself. I love that solitude time" (Cherri Eskridge, 8/6/1997). Others mention the lack of sounds from civilization, noting the absence of car horns, police sirens, and even air planes as a boon afforded by camping.

Rock Crawlers, too, venture into the outback as a means for escaping the normal activities that absorb or dominate daily life:

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<sup>17</sup> These values are not unlike feelings of nostalgia; for more on this dynamic, see: Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977, 188.

I'm in the office 40 hours a week, just absolutely wired to the chair. You can't hardly get out the door. You've got people on your case every minute. A lot of it's high-pressure, high-stress, and people hate to—you know, nobody likes to go to the dentist. People hate that! And they tell you that 3 times a day. You know, "I'd rather have a baby than go to the dentist!" ...You get that kind of flak, and for me, it's an excellent escape or release, or just a safety valve and whatever you call it—to just go...out in the garage, turn on the trouble light, and crawl under the Jeep...For me, it's really a good outlet, or an ability to blow off some steam and do something that's totally different from what I do every day, all day, in the office. And, it's enjoyable, and I go a lot of times on an afternoon where the family's not available and nobody's around and I'll jump in the Jeep by myself—and take off. And I can be on a tough 4-wheel drive trail in 10 minutes from my house. There's places that are right above Alpine [Utah] that are technically difficult 4-wheeling. I go right by the lake and goof-off for a couple of hours, and just get away—don't worry about it. No telephones, no *nuthin'*. (Ed Isaacson, 4/4/1996)

Because of this feeling of physical separation, many recreationalists also believe that the back country affords them chances to remove themselves from the negative influences of society: "There's not cars, there's not pollution. When you go for a walk in the morning you can be by yourself" (Amy Eskridge, 8/6/1997). Quinn Mortensen—a Rock Crawler, rock climber, camper, hiker, and some-time mountain biker—comments that "everyone is influenced by how others perceive them. You get alone in the mountains and basically you can be yourself" (5/11/1997).

One couple on a rock crawling trail ride in Moab informed me that they went 4-wheeling as a chance to "get [our son] away from the drugs and alcohol other kids are doing" (*Jeep Safari*, 1993). They emphasized that taking time to enjoy the south Utah environment together as a family was one of the reasons their son had no behavior-related problems, unlike other youth living in their neighborhood (fig: 1.17).

This attitude is not unusual. I worked at *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, a



**FIG: 1.17** Children are ubiquitous to the trail ride milieu, where they are socialized into the rock crawling culture. There are frequently special games for kids during breaks. Toys on the trail rides are often off-road oriented: 4x4 pull-toys, radio-controlled 4x4s, and even small motorized rigs that the kids can sit in and drive appear during rests. This boy plays with a toy Jeep on the *Rubicon* trail. (Courtesy Off-Road.com)



business that specializes in selling parts for, and building, off-road vehicles. Couples routinely come into the store as part of their plan to build an off-road vehicle. Many explain that they intend to use their rig as a means for taking their children away from the urban sprawl. Many note that such positive experiences would be beneficial to their children's characters (figs: 1.18, 1.19). One hiker/camper similarly endorses the back country as a place to rear one's family: "It serves as a vehicle to teach children the principles of preparation, responding to challenges, dealing with crises, overcoming physical hardships, pressing beyond previous limits" (Chris Eskridge, 8/6/1997).

Most people experience a sensation of freedom accompanying this escape. Jim Broadbent, a Rock Crawler, asserts that he feels "just free to the wind" (4/9/1996). How enthusiasts exercise their freedom is a personal choice. Victor Mokler comments that "I can go where I want, when I want--within limits of the trails anyway--and when I'm tired I sleep, hungry, I eat, etcetera. I can do whatever I please. If I feel like running around naked for half the day and jumping in some high mountain lake, so be it!" (5/2/1997). On the other hand, Cheri Eskridge emphasized that she enjoys when her family devotes a portion of their hiking/camping time to religious-oriented pursuits. Her family takes time to relate the back country and the experiences these places add to their religious beliefs (8/6/1997).

The view that back country offers escape and solace is a strong motivator for those venturing into these spaces for recreational activities. Time spent in these recreational pursuits is more than the fun experienced during the activity; it represents an escape from the work-a-day world, an escape from the masses, and



**FIG: 1.18** Mary and Cecil Rice (both in their 70s) stated that they “raised [their] family out of this Jeep,” which they purchased new. They were proud that their kids are now raising their own children with frequent outback trips. Notice their 1946 Jeep’s “door wells that Cecil specially modified for [Mary]...and for family use” (Mary Rice, *Jeep Safari*, 1996)



**FIG: 1.19** Families gather together at a *Jeep Safari* lunch break on the *Secret Spire* trail, Moab.

even an escape from negative social forces. As such, these experiences are often valued as character building, or even as "a sanity check" (Victor Mokler, 5/2/1997).

### Outback As Hazard

"It's about cheating death, living on the edge."  
(Dan Wynkoop, 5/26/94)

The opportunity for *hazard* is the final boon offered to recreationalists by the land. Hazards are those aspects of the land which push individuals to leave their "zone of security" (Bale, 125). These outdoor locations have also been referred to as "landscape[s] of exposure" (Appleton, 1996, 132). That is, persons passing through these "gloriously rugged natural venues" are more vulnerable to danger or possible injury than they would be during every-day activities (Konik, 40). Essentially, this aesthetic depends upon the landscape as a source of heightened "exposure to danger" (Bale, 124), or a place to "discover [one's] limits" (Konik, 39).

These dangers engender the pulse-quickening "excitement" and the "high that you get from something different than every-day life" sought by many outdoors people (Amy Eskridge, 8/6/1997). One Rock Crawler who is involved in myriad other recreational activities, pushes his limits outdoors

because it's fun. I love to push things to the edge in my recreational endeavors. I am very much an extreme skier, ride my mountain bike at the edge...and do the same with my dirt bike [motorcycle]. Four wheeling is...another expression of that. I love to be outdoors in any capacity (fig: 1.18). (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996)

In this perspective, the back country is linked psychologically with pushing oneself



**FIG: 1.20** Glenn Wakefield gets extreme on an Arizona trail ledge. (Courtesy Off-Road.com)

to the limit physically.<sup>18</sup>

The opportunity for such adventure comes from activities requiring participants to meld their movements "into a context in which they can more effectively evoke the satisfaction which comes...from successful strategic participation in [this] entire environment" (Appleton, 1996, 157). Many activities require enthusiasts to pit their skills against specific environmental contexts which would not be thought of as conducive to their mode of locomotion. Extreme skiing is a good example of such recreational activity.<sup>19</sup> Extreme skiers now ski off cliff

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<sup>18</sup> Bale has noted links between "sport, space, landscape and psychology" (124).

<sup>19</sup> Caillois refers to similar endeavors as *ilinx*, noting that these partly in-control, partly out-of-control, activities "momentarily destroy the stability of perception and

faces hundreds of feet high. These runs are accomplished by jumping from snow covered outcrop to outcrop down the cliff face. The locations these skiers frequent could kill those not skilled in the techniques required by these enthusiasts; mistakes by these enthusiasts, themselves, could (and do) result in fatal falls.

White water rafting and kayaking are also currently on the rise, and these communities are drawn to raging rivers for reasons similar to those of the extreme skiers: "An adrenal gland is a terrible thing to waste" (Edgerly, 81). The type of river they favor can be characterized by its dramatic challenges:

The recommended segment is a popular stretch of [difficult] whitewater flowing through a gorge that extends through Pisgah and Cherokee National Forests. The Nolichucky [river] has a lot to offer whitewater paddlers, dropping 35 to 60 feet per mile and boasting such well-known rapids as Jaws, On The Rocks and Quarter Mile. (David Jenkins, 38)

Often, speed is an essential part to the challenge of traversing a dangerous topographic milieu. The thrill accompanying swift movement is one people regularly seek, but find difficult to put into words. However, occasionally an individual finds a combination of words that seems to encapsulate this sensation:

During the run there is a panorama of feeling and sensation—luscious colors, feelings of weightlessness, a sense of everything being quiet and an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. And, oh yeah, it's freaky as hell. (Jack McClure, quoted in: Creamer, 11)

Although this comment was elicited from a drag racer, the sensations at speed that he describes have also been noted by enthusiasts in other communities.

Dave Mosher, a motocross devotee, rides his motorcycle because he enjoys

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inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise ludic mind...The disturbance...is commonly sought for its own sake" (23).

"the rush...the free feeling...[of being] as close to floating through the air without actually floating through the air" (8/20/1997). The feeling of freedom and floating is closely linked to the hazards offered by the back country: "its a rush—you don't know what's going to happen, you can just ride fast. Anything can happen." David continues, elaborating on the rush provided by the combination of speed and uncertainty; note that he specifically comments that the location for such excitement is provided by the topographic setting:

- D.M. Sand dunes are the best...because you can just *fly* across them, hit--and you can launch off a dune and just *fly forever* and come down to a soft [landing] on the other side of the dunes. It's nice and rounded and you can come down to a soft landing. It's already *there* from nature; you don't have to go and build it.
- D.N. What are you thinking when you're flying through the air?
- D.M. Am I gonna crash? Am I gonna crash? Am I gonna crash [laughing]!?
- D.N. How often do you crash?
- D.M. Oh, once a trip. Once a trip guaranteed. And with a group of people it's twice a trip...because you get crazy. No rules; no nothing. You just fly. Just so you can get out of control easy. It's real easy. It's a fine line there between riding controlled and riding out of control, and it's easy to cross at the sand dunes. (8/20/1997)

One rapidly growing sport community that thrives on a combination of speed and technique to negotiate arduous territory is mountain bikers. Dave Mosher is also a mountain biker. One of his favorite trails is in *Provo Canyon*, located just north of Provo, Utah.

*Squaw Peak*...is a rush! You gotta brake almost the whole time or else—you never have to peddle...There's little launch-jumps all the way down there, and if you don't brake soon enough—you'll *just* fly off. When you land you're going just as *fast* as you can and you're lucky

to get slowed down before the next one....It's rocky. It's pretty rough and rocks and stuff is in the way that's loose. There's a lot of loose stuff, so you've got to be careful about that. [The trail] is...not extreme, but dangerous. It's not extreme, but it *is* dangerous. (8/20/1997)

David's description of the trail centers on the danger and excitement it provides. For him, the attraction resides in the pulse-quickenning, hell-bent, never-know-what-will-happen-next, benefits it provides. "It *is* dangerous...because it's loose and you can get up to *maximum speed* if you don't know what you are doing. You can get up to your maximum speed *real fast*" (David Mosher, 8/20/1997)!

Speed is not always an important component of the thrill offered by the land. Rock Crawlers achieve thrills by taking their rigs over and through obstacles which seem ridiculously impossible to those not associated with the community (figs: 1.21-1.26). "So the challenge is to get [your vehicle] up [obstacles] as smooth as you can and as gracefully as possible, and over the worst possible obstacle without breaking parts--*hopefully* (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). The reason many attempt these dangers is "because [they] enjoy driving the trails, taking the challenge, to see what the vehicle will do" (Allan Olsen, 4/12/1996).

Many non-Rock Crawlers have trouble conceiving that drivers can exclaim "I was so scared and so hyped-up—but yet so excited; I haven't been that excited about something for years" about driving at speeds of less than five miles-per-hour (Ed Isaacson, 4/16/1996). But these experiences are what many Rock Crawlers crave:

I 'wheel for the thrill of it. Though I do appreciate the beauty of the wilderness while I'm there. I like challenging, technical, stuff that is

both fun to watch and fun to do. I've been to *Las Cruces, Dakota Territory, Sledgehammer/Jackhammer/Aftershock, Moab,* and everything tough around here. I enjoy the thrill of it (F maps 1 & 2). (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996)

Many Rock Crawlers search out trails that are so "challenging that you are wasted by the time you get home" (Shannon Shirk, 4/21/1996). Chip Brox notes that he frequents these extreme trails because:

of the enjoyment I get out of the outdoor experience, the time I spend with friends, the satisfaction you get out of being able to do something that...most people look at in awe—thinking: "No one can do that! You can't even walk up that rock, let alone drive a vehicle up that rock!" The ability of a vehicle to ascend a rather steep incline of some kind, or come down a decline that a normal person would have to sit on his fanny and skid down on his *butt* is *absolutely amazing!* And the adrenaline rush that you get out of that is second to none—*absolutely* second to none. (4/7/1996)

Drivers who regularly frequent such trails are referred to as "hard core" or "big dogs" These names mean that the thrill induced by travelling over "challenging, technical stuff" is something they live for (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996).

These trails can be boulder-strewn valleys so convoluted and broken that drivers are tempted to note: "The cool thing about *Jackhammer* [trail] is you get to it and you're like, 'Where's the trail?'" (Shannon Shirk, 4/21/1996). They can also provide obstacles like five foot ledges that drivers must drop their rigs off, as with *White Knuckle Hill*, in Moab, Utah. Other trails boast rivers deep enough that participants question: "Am I going to sink or swim?" (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). Each trail has a different set of obstacles to negotiate. Many could ruin a vehicle or hurt its passengers if the driver makes a mistake.

Not all outdoor activities seem as dangerous as climbing one's Jeep along a





**FIG: 1.21** Matt Smith “gets air” on *Dump-Bump*, an obstacle east of Moab, Utah. (Courtesy Ken Harrison)



**FIG: 1.22** Matt hangs in the balance. (Courtesy Ken Harrison)



**FIG: 1.23** Matt continues his climb up *Dump-Bump*. For a second no one knew which way he would go. He finally settled back onto terra firma with no problems. (Courtesy Ken Harrison)



**FIG: 1.24** A Jeep climbs over large boulder on the *Guardian* trail, New Mexico. (Courtesy Off-Road.com)



**FIG: 1.25** Jeff Beach climbs a ledge on a southern Utah trail. (Courtesy Jeff Beach)



**FIG: 1.26** Jeff Beach climbs a five-foot vertical ledge, then must straddle the chasm at it's top. The potential for personal or vehicular damage on such obstacles obvious. (Courtesy Jeff Beach)

cliff. Yet many do. Campers note that there is occasionally an element of danger in camping which can add excitement to the trip. The danger involved in camping could come from something as mundane as slipping on rocks. Additionally, "there's a certain danger to [camping]...because you don't know if there's a dangerous animal lurking" (Holly Neal, 8/2/1997). "In my home state of Colorado last year, black bears ate two people, opening a small trailer-home like a can of tuna to get at one of them" (Tilton, 36).<sup>20</sup> Such possibilities add to the excitement and adventure of camping.

The link between all of these different scenarios is the excitement produced by the danger and/or uncertainty involved in negotiating or interacting with these places. Participants feel charged by such episodes. In fact, some imagine that these experiences provide a rush comparable to that provided by drugs (Charlie Copsey, 4/1994). This "rush" is a magnet, drawing many Rock Crawlers—and other recreationalists—into the outback.

Recreationalists "infuse" and "create the landscapes" in which they undertake their activities in terms of *prospect*, *refuge*, and *hazard* (Kahn, 188). The combination of these three perspectives creates a fully-realized experience. However, other communities do not see eye to eye with this gestalt of the landscape.

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<sup>20</sup> The very real danger of bear attacks upon outdoor enthusiasts exists, see: Bob Sarber, 184.

## PRESERVATIONIST COMMUNITIES

Preservationist groups are comprised of individuals concerned with "the preservation of the outstanding wildlands...and the management of these lands in their natural state" (Spring 1997 *SUWA* newsletter, 2).<sup>21</sup> Essentially, this is based upon two main drives: (1) lands perceived as not bearing the mark of human intervention must be managed so as to keep them in this state, and (2) "human-disturbed environments" must be "restored" to their former condition (*Sierra Club*, <http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/413.html>).<sup>22</sup>

These views are expanded and elaborated upon by the *Sierra Club*. Their mission statement is explicit in its references to how public lands can be used and protected:

- To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth;
- to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's eco systems and resources;
- To educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and
- To use all lawful means to carry out these objectives.  
(<http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/>)

Like other preservation-based communities, the focus of the *Sierra Club* is to

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<sup>21</sup> For more on preservationist and environmental ideologies, see works by: Nicholas Baldwin, Michael Frome, and Joseph Petulla.

<sup>22</sup> See: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash's book-length study of America's moral aesthetic regarding their relationship to wild landscapes.

"protect and restore...the wild places of the earth...where the forces of nature prevail" (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/9/1997). Essentially, the crux of this perspective is that wilderness locations should remain "free of all contaminating influences" of society (fig: 1.27) (Worster, 6).<sup>23</sup>



**FIG: 1.27** Cutting into the mountains, *Kennecott Copper Mine* looms over the farms south of Salt Lake City. For many preservationists this, the world's largest open pit mine, is a vision of contamination.

For these folk, wilderness can have a bi-level meaning. It can be used generally in reference to wild places. This is a more vernacular conceptualization. But the term also has a poignant legal definition. Wilderness space is a legal designation for which these groups push. Wilderness standing means that the

<sup>23</sup> Wilson notes that "since at least the witch burnings of the sixteenth century, people of European origin have regarded nature as separate from human civilization, which makes it possible to argue for its protection" (25).

space is to remain free of any motorized traffic, equine travel (in some situations), and in some locations even hikers are forbidden. Sam Rushforth, a member of the *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA)*, the *Sierra Club*,<sup>24</sup> and the *Utah County Clean Air Coalition*, explains his understanding of Wilderness designation:

Of course the 1963 *Wilderness Act* says that essentially lands that are untrammelled by man—their gendered term—and where the evidence of man is essentially absent or minimized [can be designated as *Wilderness*]. Five thousand acres in extent, or of the size that it can be managed to maintain its wilderness character, and then with adequate opportunities for...recreation that is essentially of a primitive nature. For me, roads have a lot to do with *Wilderness*, I don't—I'm a big believer in roadless areas. So, for me, tracts of land that are relatively unmarked by humans, in particular, are roadless. At least these have the potential to qualify as *Wilderness*. (10/13/1997)

Like recreational communities, preservationists' concepts of "wilderness" (in its legal or vernacular conceptualization) are motivated by images of *refuge*. Wayne Hoskisson, a dedicated activist who vigorously works with preservationist groups such as the *Sierra Club*, the *Wilderness Society*, the *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, the *Uinta Mountain Club*, and the *Utah Wilderness Coalition*,<sup>25</sup> notes that being in the wilderness provides "the opportunity for solitude, the unrestricted chance to enjoy the land without restrictions" (9/7/1997). In an assertion similar to comments made by mountain bikers and Rock Crawlers, he states that these places provide chances to "escape the city [and its] people" (9/7/1997). Like Wayne, many feel that "as open spaces become further cluttered and air pollution in our cities

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<sup>24</sup> Sam also created and maintains an internet web site for the *Sierra Club's* Utah chapter.

<sup>25</sup> Wayne notes that the *Utah Wilderness Coalition* is "an umbrella organization linking many groups...it links about one-hundred and fifty groups" (9/7/1997).

worsens, the value of the wild country Utah has to offer for everyone will only increase" (Ken Rait, 16).

Terry Tempest Williams, a novelist and member of SUWA's board of directors, authored a novel entitled *Refuge: A Season in the Wilderness*. The novel—an eco-critical response—explored experiences and interaction with the Utah wilderness that helped the author deal with the cancer-induced sickness and death of her mother. Through the encounters she had with the land, and its indigenous life forms, Tempest was able to find solace and personal and spiritual strength during a challenging and frightening segment of her life.<sup>26</sup>

But preservationists' enjoyment of the wilderness is not limited to viewing it as *refuge*; most also esteem these locations as *prospect*. Like recreationalists they find these places "fulfilling on an aesthetic or spiritual basis" (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997). Although, many note: "you couldn't find very much [currently remaining] wilderness that is pristine in the contiguous forty-eight states" (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997).<sup>27</sup> In fact, many preservationists are recreationalists in that they spend time camping, hiking, (non-motorized) boating, and using other forms of enjoyment that do not "present serious and special problems of impact on the environment" (<http://www.sierraclub.org/policy/408.html>). This point is where the preservationist communities diverge from the recreation-based groups: how these lands should best be preserved, managed, and experienced, so as to ensure their existence for future

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<sup>26</sup> For more, see: Farr & Snyder, 197-211.

<sup>27</sup> For more, see: Wilson, 223-55.



generations (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997).

Rather than enjoying these places by venturing into them with a vehicle, preservationists believe they should be enjoyed by non-motorized means. Some believe that there are areas where no human should even tread upon the soil. Since there are many different communities, they obviously do not all see eye to eye on what forms of access are acceptable. Additionally, location also affects these choices; one group may believe: "In certain areas it is possible for off-road vehicles to travel cross-country. Repeated vehicle travel across sensitive soils quickly creates a visible track" (<http://www.suwa.org/faqpart4.html#roads>). Others may see the same tract of land and argue that no human should ever set foot or drive a 4x4 within that boundary.<sup>28</sup>

No matter how strictly a given community feels that public lands should be managed, most seem to feel that "wilderness areas are a core to something more...and [they should] not [be] just small islands" (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997). Elaborating on this idea, Wayne states: "A park is real nice--people can see it. But it is not large enough to have any real benefit...animals need to move about--to migrate" (9/7/1997). Wayne sees the shrinking tracts of wilderness and laments that the general populace will not realize that these areas are disappearing "before the nightmare of creeping urbanization" until they are gone (Nash, 380). And once they

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<sup>28</sup> Following a lengthy discussion about the rise of the recreational and aesthetic appreciation of the American deserts (91-125), David Teague concludes: "Seeking aesthetic escape the way our culture currently does--through ecotourism, for instance--is a human endeavor that works no differently in the desert than it does elsewhere. Aesthetic escapes are experiences that people enjoy immensely and for which an ecosystem must pay dearly" (125).

are gone they cannot be brought back. He is quick to note the plants in Utah that have disappeared. He also remembers a type of skunk which was unique to certain areas in southern Utah that is now extinct, "gone forever" (9/7/1997).

Sam Rushforth agrees with Wayne. In fact, discussing the "fragmentation of the landscape" he uses terminology similar to Wayne's (10/13/1997). Words like "islands" are repeated; and he elaborates on how these places are key to something more. He sees them as keys to the cohesiveness (or lack of it) of the people:

One thing is perfectly clear....If we end up with islands that fulfill the legal '63 Wilderness Act definition of Wilderness, in a sea of abused and developed lands, we haven't won a thing! What we have to do is be convinced as a people--in the United States, and in particular in the western parts of the country, which are very divisive--we have to be convinced that preservation of the land and love and care of the land--no matter what its official, legal definition--is what we should be doing. And unless we accomplish that I think we are going to end-up with more fragmentation of the landscape. And more divisive arguments among the people. (10/13/1997)

Many preservationists reason that as long as vehicles, extraction-based activities,<sup>29</sup> and in some cases even hikers, enter certain sensitive areas, these locations may be damaged beyond repair before something can be done to protect them. Commenting upon the issue of protecting wilderness areas from the gamut of activities that are dangerous to their existence, Wayne noted that "it's a constant battle; We have to find ways of protecting these areas." He later focused for a moment upon extraction-based activities, solemnly noting: "We live in a culture where people see the land as a place to extract resources" (Wayne Hoskisson,

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<sup>29</sup> The renowned preservationist Edward Abbey published an article against the ranching and farming communities entitled: "Even the Bad Guys Wear White Hats: Cowboys, Ranchers, and the Ruin of the West."

9/7/1997). Sam discussed the land in similar terms (10/13/1997).

These concerns lead preservationist activists to work long and tireless hours in defense of these lands.<sup>30</sup> They place lobbyists in Washington, work with groups they see as dangerous to specific areas—in efforts to find alternative locations for their activities—and publicize these dangerous activities in the media if the groups do not work with them. They also “watch...the federal agencies that manage these areas, to make sure they don’t allow the degradation of these places” (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997).

## A LAND OF CONFLICTING VISIONS AND VOICES

Although the following discussion focuses upon how Rock Crawlers, as recreationalists, fit into the general land use milieu of the west, a large portion of the discussion focuses on relations between communities falling into the three different landscape gestalts: *extraction*, *recreation*, and *preservation*. This is because communities falling into each of these designations vie for the same tracts of land. Essentially, each group’s traditions regarding these places force them to wage war with other differing groups to protect *their own* beliefs. These wars—usually fought

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<sup>30</sup> *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, written by Dave Foreman, takes the preservation goal to a militant extent. It begins with a short disclaimer, then launches into a study of how to sabotage the machinery (helicopters, heavy machinery, etc...) used by extraction based corporations. For instance, nails or spikes can be driven into trees so as to ruin chain saws. The ultimate goal of such actions is to make the continuous repairs to these machines so expensive as to render expansion into these areas unprofitable. The writer believes that the corporations will then leave.

in courts of law and even Congress—are very real. Many hours are spent at grass-roots levels supporting these fights. Millions of dollars are spent for lobbying, legal fees, and propaganda. In fact, an entire industry has developed to serve the land use concerns. Consequently, one's hope for the continued existence of these places rests in "winning" these conflicts. This view places many groups at odds with each other.

In fact, when I commented to a group of Rock Crawlers that I was going to be interviewing individuals from preservationist communities, one of my them laughingly asked "how long can you last before you haul-off and whack one of them?" Another called them "zealots." Others made less respectable comments. Jokes about me secretly becoming one of "them" were bandied back and forth. Although the tone seemed light and joking, the content of the conversation was less so. It was obvious that preservationist communities are regarded as a threat. In a situation where clashing concepts of the land can mean the death of the rock crawling way of life—in fact, the death of their conceptualization of the West—they are always mindful of other groups' perspectives when considering "their" land.

An awareness of Rock Crawlers' perceptions regarding the physical environment does not fully explain the social matrix in which they exist. Understanding this milieu forms a crucial basis for grasping how the landscape figures into their world view and activities. As previously noted, each of the three conflicting landscape *gestalts* produces groups that praise the land for widely diverging reasons. Consequently, communities falling into these three perspectives regularly "battle" for control over who has the right to utilize the *unimproved*

*land/back country/wilderness* (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997). These contentions are not just concerned with differing opinions; they literally decide who can and cannot access the contested tracts of land.

These land use battles are not relegated to (the frequent) minor conflicts with local ranchers over where they graze their herds. Greater contentions rage between preservationists and large corporate machines such as *Conoco Inc.* *Conoco* recently targeted sites in the *Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument* areas in southern Utah, as a location for oil exploration. It is alleged that this drilling could take place within eyesight of some of the southwest's most picturesque and fragile topography.

Preservationists immediately became involved in a movement to stop *Conoco*:

At the end of February, SUWA, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society and the Grand Canyon Trust met with representatives from *Conoco Inc.* and asked the corporation to work with us to find suitable leases outside the *Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument*, before any drilling took place. The company said no. (Spring 1997 *SUWA* newsletter, 17)

Each group is concerned with maintaining a climate conducive to its perception of the landscape. Wilderness groups push to keep the land in its present form, or to restore it to its past splendor, while the corporate image of the land rests on the transformation of resources to consumable product. *Conoco's* failure to agree with the alternate choices proposed by representatives from the united preservationist

groups ensured a vicious legal battle accompanied by public relations blitzes.<sup>31</sup> And as *Conoco* begins their work, the battle continues.

But the combat lines are not always so easily drawn; the numerous communities falling into each of the three perspectives do not see eye to eye with other groups sharing their landscape gestalt. Thus, groups that would seem to be friendly with each other often vie for the same spaces, producing land-use battles and/or hostilities. For instance, the desert surrounding Moab, Utah, has become a gathering place for 4-wheelers and mountain bikers from around the world. Its arduous terrain provides challenges and beautiful sights to those travelling the trails. There should be enough room for both groups to enjoy this terrain without incident.

However, at both 1993 and 1994 Rock Crawling events in Moab, 4x4 drivers discussed altercations involving mountain bikers. Many blamed the bikers for these incidents; although, some blamed other Rock Crawlers. It became obvious that hostilities, roused over who has the right to use the trails, erupt and routinely separate these two communities. I am also a mountain biker—as are many Rock Crawlers—and have been baffled by these rivalries. Why, I questioned, would these two recreational groups harbor animosity towards each other?

I was further surprised by the reaction I got from the staff at a specialty mountain biking shop when they learned I was also an off-road vehicle enthusiast. They balked, and seemed genuinely shocked that I could harbor the views of a group that seemed clearly at odds with their own. These antagonistic views are not

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of environmental law, and its use during battles concerning the land, see: Roderick Nash, 272-315.

unanimous. In fact, many mountain bikers routinely come to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply* to fix or modify their 4x4s. However, a rivalry does sometimes surface between the two communities when they meet in the back country.

During the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Labor Day Camp-Out*, in Moab, Utah, I was riding with Quinn Mortensen in his Bronco. We happened upon a small group of bikers sharing the *Chicken Corners* trail with us. He slowed "so as not to dust them" (8/31/1997), and rolled down his window to say "hello" to the bikers. We slowly moved along-side them long enough for a short conversation regarding the trail, the weather, and the quality of their ride. Driving away, Quinn noted that "we should never miss a chance to do some P-R work with mountain bikers" (8/31/1997).

Such efforts are commonly discussed by the Rock Crawling community:

One thing that offers instant reward is to show courtesy to other trail users, such as hikers, horse riders, and bicyclists. It shouldn't be too hard to leave them space when passing on the trail. If you can, stop and turn your engine off. Horses can spook easily, which can make for a potentially memorable meeting. (Nylund, 109)

Although expanding the discussion beyond that of the mountain biking community, the above comment still discusses meetings with other trail-using groups in terms of showing a respectful willingness to interact with them in a positive manner.

Narratives supporting these tensions usually involve land use rights. Stories from the 1993 and 1994 Moab events all concerned who had "the right to be on the trail" (1993 Rock Crawler's trailside comment). Rock Crawlers swapped stories about bikers who would not give-way to Rock Crawlers. One Jeep driver told several people gathered during a trail ride break about a group of bikers who "spread

out across the trail as they rode" and would not let his group by. Since leaving the trail to go around them was not an option,<sup>32</sup> the Jeepers were forced to follow behind the slow-moving bikers "for a couple of miles."

But offenses go both ways; bikers note incidents where off-roaders intentionally flew by them on dusty trails—leaving the bikes, and their riders, in billowing clouds of fine-grained trail dust. Trying to breathe while riding in such airborne silt is nearly impossible. The particles also get into clothing and bicycle gears. This is certainly aggravating. Such acts only further push these groups into antagonistic positions, making them more apt to compete for land usage rather than to strive for a working/sharing relationship.

Jim Broadbent, an avid Rock Crawler, fisherman, hunter, and camper, has noted the need to grow beyond such rivalries:

A lot of public interest people, they're looking at land-use these days. You know—the Jeep groups, the ATV groups, and the environmental groups—and somewhere we have to have harmony in those groups in order to continue to use [the land] peacefully with—amongst one another. So you have to give-way to the bicyclists or the hiker and things like that. (4/9/1996)

His comment expands beyond a focus on strife between similar groups by noting environmentalists. This statement, then, also includes communities holding contradicting expectations of the land.

Jim's comment is important because it forms the basis for the "multiple-use" ethic adopted by most Rock Crawlers. "Multiple-use" has a specific meaning for

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<sup>32</sup> To learn why leaving the trail was not an option, see the discussions on *Tread Lightly!* in chapters two and five.



them. Generally, when using this term they refer to public lands which are open to usage by many differing communities. In other words, these places should remain open to many groups entertaining many different landscape gestalts:

I believe multiple-use to be lands that are geared towards *any* use that is not detrimental to the land: mountain bikers, hikers, 4-wheelers, people on horseback, anything like that—you know—that use the same land, whether you have each trail open to all of those or have trails specific to each one—you know—remains up to the judgement of the people managing the area. (Quinn Mortensen, 8/20/1997)

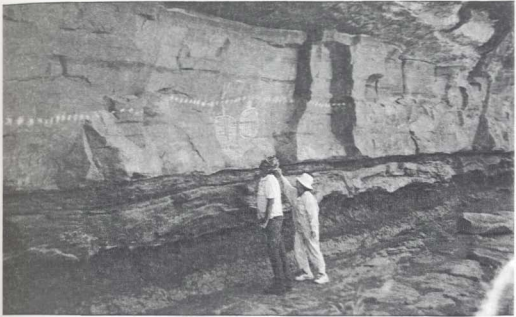
It is interesting that the above description specifically notes activities which are believed to have no "detrimental" effect upon the landscape. Perceived as "multi-use" zones (Albright, 13), these locations become the locus for activities such as:

snowmobiling, horseback riding and motorcycling....cross-country skiing, riding dune buggies, hunting, fishing, hiking and all around adventuring....You can four-wheel, hike, photograph scenery galore, explore old mine sites and historic buildings, add to your flora and fauna lists, take nature walks and feel like you are part of a unique period of history (fig: 1.25). (13-15)

In addition to Rock Crawlers' perception of multiple use lands as offering locations for numerous leisure activities, these places are also available to communities who do not share the recreational gestalt. During a conversation regarding the importance of the multiple use perspective, Randy Robinson touched upon this dynamic:

First of all, I think multiple use means pretty much what the name implies. And that is that—the land is kept *open* so that it can be used, and provide the things that are available there for everybody in our society. But, in a managed, controlled, way. But, multiple use, meaning that it can be used for farming, ranching, mining, recreation...all those kinds of things. (9/21/1997)

Designated as "multiple-use" by the government, these lands are also available—as



**FIG: 1.28** Chip Brox, leader of a ride along the *Salt Creek Canyon* trail, studies some ancient Native American pictographs on a canyon wall with another trail ride participant.

Randy notes—to those groups who might utilize them for their monetary benefits.<sup>33</sup> This discussion has already touched upon cattle ranchers. They make extensive use of these lands for grazing livestock throughout the west. These spaces are also available for lumber, mining, and many other activities (Summer 1994 *SUWA* newsletter, 20).

The multiple use concept, which is shared by recreationalists and extractors,<sup>34</sup> is at odds with preservationists' wilderness philosophy. In fact, as previously noted, wilderness is not merely a term for the preservationists; it is also a federal-level legal

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion on *multiple use*, see: Wilson, 228.

<sup>34</sup> Recreationalists favor the multiple use ethic because it protects their leisure spaces. Extraction groups favor this approach because it ensures that they will have a continuing supply of locations for present and future ventures.

designation for which they aggressively push. Wilderness designation and multiple use are currently antithetical and mutually exclusive ways of managing the land. Randy noted how designating a space as "Wilderness" extinguishes the multiple use properties of that land:

I think the biggest threat to [the back country] is Wilderness designation. Wilderness designation eliminates the multiple use concept...entirely. I mean, it makes the property available for use only by a select few people. And that includes only those few people who are unusually, *exceptionally*, healthy. It pretty-much limits to the younger members of our population, and it limits us only to recreational use for that select group. For the most part, many of the areas that we're talking about—especially in the case of the remote desert areas—it limits the use to almost no one. At least for the majority of the year, and sometimes for the entire year it will limit it pretty much to non-use, rather than any use at all. The key factor there is water availability. (9/21/1997)

When asked what *his* description of Wilderness designation would be, Randy answered using a rhetoric concerning access and availability which is common to Rock Crawlers:

Well, if we're talking about Wilderness designation the way it's currently conceived—and we have a legal description that is the description when Wilderness is designated in the United States—and that is...that once this is designated, and they have criteria to decide whether it qualifies, but once it's designated as Wilderness its use is limited to...access to it is...limited to...non-mechanical access. In other words, by walking or...for a select few, by horseback. But again, when we are talking about a desert environment, it limits it to almost no one in those extreme cases where we want to get into an area that's more than a couple of miles from the nearest road. It's no access at all. Because a human being can't pack enough water to allow them to go more than a few miles. And a horse is not much better off, it can't pack water for the rider and for itself.

And so it limits the access to so many of those areas that once they are designated as Wilderness, they are no longer being used by anyone. They're just designated as huge tracts of land that have no value unless there's some kind of an ulterior motive behind their designation that we don't know about. (9/21/1997)

In light of the limiting nature of Wilderness designation, the "multiple use" ethic is important for Rock Crawlers. This is because it represents and preserves their right to access back country trails. This access is more than a mere diversion, it is also perceived as a way to enjoy Western heritage and history. Linked with a notion of heritage, the back country is regularly seen as a repository for history; this history is regularly synonymous with popular culture's depictions of the West's cowboy days. These images are affected by such popular culture iconography as the paintings by Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, and essentially focus on the conviction that in the West there was a heightened sense of "individual liberation, of breaking away toward some physical and spiritual freedom" (West, 276).<sup>35</sup> This "old West," the frontier West, can be accessed and enjoyed by venturing into the back country locations (Quinn Mortensen, 5/11/1993).

Thus, heritage and history are often discussed synonymously when referring to the back country:

Through the marvels of Citizen's Band radio, Tim acted as our historical interpreter. I figure that he really enjoys history, because he sure shared a lot of it with us. The Black Hills scenery is breathtaking. It reminded me of places much farther west in the United States. In fact, the area we were in was once home to Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickock. We even drove past a site that was used as a backdrop in the motion picture "Dances With Wolves"...Even though the route was rated a 2 [in difficulty], it scored a perfect 5 for history and scenery. (Nobert, 8)

Peering out at Utah's Great Basin Desert through the old rifle ports of

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<sup>35</sup> "Image and legend have played a role in shaping human behavior no less influential than facts and events; what people thought took place, or believed to exist, [is] only slightly less important to them than what did happen, or did exist" (Billington, 467).

an old stagecoach station, I tried to imagine a lone Pony Express rider galloping across the same alkali flats and sagebrush hills that [Mark] Twain crossed by stagecoach in the early 1860's. (Huegel, 1997, 80)

This mixture of heritage, history, exploration and freedom is the way Rock Crawlers "join the great American spirit" (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996).

Individuals often feel a link with the frontier West. In fact, the lands used for 4-wheeling are often seen as a way of coming in contact with aspects of the "old West" that are not readily available to the masses (Quinn Mortensen, 5/11/1993):

I prefer the high Rockies around here [Colorado]. You know, up in the old mining towns and that kind of thing. And largely its heavy-rock and high alpine kind of terrain. I just enjoy it because you get up high; and you get to see some parts of history--essentially--that you otherwise would have to hike for--you know--half a day to get to. (Victor Mokler, 2/21/1997)

The Pony Express trail and the actual rail bed of the original Transcontinental Railroad, while not technical four-wheel drive routes, are designated national back country byways. In addition to fantastic scenery, they provide outstanding opportunities to relive legendary events that helped define the American character...Then there are the towering Henry Mountains, the last range in the lower 48 to be explored and named. (Huegel, 1996, 91)

For this reason old mining sites, ghost towns, and even Anasazi ruins are often frequented on trail rides (fig: 1.28). Essentially, the land itself is seen as a repository for Western history:

In terms of historical perspective--and that's certainly something else that you get to see as a 4-wheeler here in Utah--we get to see a lot of Navajo Indian ruins and things of that nature. I took a trip to lake Powell on the Mormon Pioneer Trail, Hole in the Rock. Got to see some pretty incredible things down there. A lot of slickrock\* there as well. And just--to have a vehicle that can take you out in the middle of the most desolate land, to experience the beauty of the forbidding desert--to be able to return unscathed is quite an enjoyable experience, I think. (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996)

There is even a strong cowboy-West feel to many aspects of the Rock Crawling culture; many off-roading events reflect this. At the 1997 *International Harvester Western Regionals*, in Tulare, California, cowboy poet Baxter Black provided the entertainment one evening. The *United 4-Wheel Drive Association's* August, 1997 convention in Reno, Nevada, was named the *Western Roundup*. And in a rock crawling video produced by Rick Russell of *Sidekick Off Road Maps*, a driver is caught during the action uttering: "The modern-day cowboy: that's 4-wheel drive, big tires, low air pressure, **posi-traction**" (1993).

However, Rock Crawlers do not view themselves as cowboys. Victor Mokler notes: "I *definitely* don't see myself as a cowboy—in *any* sense" (2/21/1997). His assertion is repeated by others who respond to the question: "Do you see yourself as a cowboy?" with the emphatic reply, "I am *not*...one of *those* guys" (Glenn Wakefield, 1/23/1997).<sup>36</sup>

But not being cowboys does not stop Rock Crawlers from feeling an affinity for the outback and the historical and recreational benefits it proffers. And when the battle concerning who gets to use back country spaces confronts them, restricting them from lands they see as part of the Western heritage, they get angry.

It's not that I advocate or condone unrestricted "off-road" cross-country travel; I don't. It's just that when special interests are able to lock up lands that have been accessible for decades...it irks me something fierce. I want to fight back. (Albright, 13)

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<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, in an article that Glenn wrote for a 4x4 magazine in 1998, he writes: "The Wild West was reborn [when]...the Black Hills 4Wheelers began an annual rockfest known as the Dakota Territory Challenge....As a result, a modern day cowboy--the off-road enthusiast--has infiltrated the hills" (26).

Similar anxiety was expressed by Dan Wynkoop, when he saw the cover of the Summer, 1994, *SUWA* newsletter, which bore the headline: "Off-Road Vehicles Ravage Our Wild Lands." Below this headline was a picture of six vehicles travelling along a trail during the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. These tactics often arouse anger within the general population against motorized recreational activities. Non-recreationalists are not aware of the special care taken during the *Jeep Safari*<sup>37</sup> so as not to damage the desert. Thus, faced with this propaganda, the non-Rock Crawlers are provoked to quash the sport. Irate, Dan commented:

Seeing that makes me so angry that I can't stand it. Anything from *them* makes my blood pressure rise...It's misrepresentation. We can't do anything to make them happy. No matter *what* we do they turn it around and misrepresent it...I wish there was something that a person like me could do. If there was, I'd do it. (8/22/1997)

David Jarvis echoed Dan's frustration during the same conversation when he mused: "The use in Moab is virtually *all* on trails, roads, and Rights of Way's" (9/5/1997). Later, he was to comment that "environmentalists...just want to close the land to everyone but themselves" (9/23/1997).

Other folks are more vehement in venting their anger and frustration towards those perceived as a threat to back country access. The following is an excerpt from an editorial that was sent to *United's Voice: The Newsletter of the United Four Wheel Drive Associations*. Alan Jenkins, the author, is a member of the *Cliffhangers 4-Wheel Drive club*:

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<sup>37</sup> For more on these practices, see chapters five and six.

It's really getting pretty depressing. Each fax, each article, each bulletin indicates that our recreational vehicle areas are diminishing. We're driving around in ever-smaller circles...Secretary [of State] Babbitt and the environmental movement are threatening the American Dream, the sense of adventure exploring our country, the restlessness that caused westward movement, the freedom to enjoy our land. Where will everyone go when all of our open lands are closed?

I recall a classic animal psychology experiment from the '50's. It began with two rats being placed in a large cage. As the experiment went on, more and more rats were added. When the cage got too crowded, the rats resorted to violence and cannibalism. Certainly, there are parallels in humankind. Our large cities are being overwhelmed by violent crimes of every sort. On our own personal plain, our national parks are under-financed and over-crowded. Park rangers are armed to keep the peace.

With more and more open land being closed, even greater stress will be placed on our national parks and monuments. Incursions onto closed land is inevitable...At some point, the people [will] revolt and therein lies the greatest possibility for Armageddon...OK, so it's an extreme point of view, but there are grains of truth throughout. Because of four-wheel drive vehicles and open lands, my kids and I have seen so much. I seriously doubt that our grandchildren will see nearly as much of this land as we have. When someone says "let's go explore", you better take them up on it. Because the area you explore today is going to be closed tomorrow.

Write your Congressman, write the **BLM\*** district office, write Secretary Babbitt, for God's sake, write somebody. Tell them you want your land back. (9)

This angry letter voices the fear held by many Rock Crawlers. This fear is that back country spaces will disappear or be permanently hedged-off from public or motorized access of any kind. This, it is dreaded, will be the outcome of the current disputations concerning who can and cannot venture into these locations.

Most Rock Crawlers feel justified in their anger. This indignation is understandable when we realize that threats to the outback present a very real threat to "individual and cultural identity and security" (Ryden, 40). For many, their conception of self, community, and of the West is intimately bound to their



conceptualization and utilization of the outback (64).<sup>38</sup> Thus, these spaces present a profoundly emotional core.<sup>39</sup> The possibility of being separated from these locations, and the traditional ways of accessing them, threatens this entire world view. Individual and communal "identit[ies may] become tenuous if [this] geographical root is cut" (Ryden, 94). This sense of identity is core for many people and when access to locations giving rise to this sense of identity are in danger, or the places themselves are threatened, "we feel threatened as well" (40).

Thus, a battle rages over who has the "right" to use the contested public lands. Consequently, Rock Crawlers try to restrict their outback behavior so as not to give the "enviro nazis" ammo to fuel their battle tactics (Victor Mokler, 7/8/1997).<sup>40</sup> Individuals remind each other—vocally and in print—that unless back country behavior is always appropriate, the chance to venture into these places may be lost:

Please observe...[the rules] with unswerving dedication. These areas offer an almost ideal compromise between the total wilderness experience and vehicle access. Let's not do anything to give the "opposition" a reason to try to kick us and our four-wheeled steeds out! (Werkmeister, 1993, 64-5)

Terms like "enviro nazi" are often used to describe those comprising the "opposition." Other terms such as "tree hugger," "eco freak," "enviro whiner" and other, less socially acceptable nomenclatures, are also used. These references are

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<sup>38</sup> For more concerning the relationship between place and constructions of self and community, see: Basso, 1996, 85-6; Wilson, 242.

<sup>39</sup> Miriam Kahn concurs, noting that "places are emotional landscapes" (195).

<sup>40</sup> For more on behavior-modification as a way to preserve rock crawling as a sport, see chapter two.

levelled towards those preservationists perceived as threatening the future use of trails and the lands through which they pass, thus threatening the rock crawling way of life.

Name-calling aside, these two groups often butt heads because their perspectives regarding the landscape widely differ. These basic perceptual differences create contradicting approaches to the land that rarely find common ground. For instance: since the Rock Crawling community limits travel to existing trails they must register these with the government to ensure that they are documented as existing routes. If this is not done these trails might be closed to vehicular travel. This is because roads that are not recognized and designated as "open" by the *Forest Service*, become closed to travel in the state of Utah. If trails are not registered then they automatically default to a "closed to the public" status.

Preservationists contest road claims made by Rock Crawlers, referring to these roads as "routes that are semi-traditional that are not healthy for the land" (Wayne Hoskisson, 9/7/1997). Because of the rugged and ungraded nature of these routes, other preservationists have referred to their designation as recognized trails as "bullshit" (Sam Rushforth, 10/13/1997). They also refer to them as "outrageous," and allege that these roads, which 2 wheel drive cars cannot negotiate, are "elusive" and that they travel through "primitive lands" (Spring 1997 *SUWA* newsletter, 9).

The fact that the trails are nearly unpassable to cars and most casual 4x4 drivers leads many preservationists to argue that these "forgotten jeep trails" should be closed "because roads detract from [wilderness'] natural, unaltered state." They continue, referring to those fighting to keep these roads open as "anti-wilderness"

and "wilderness haters" (<http://www.suwa.org/faqpart4.html#roads>). However, these assumptions are based upon the notion that the roads must be in pristine, graded, and level condition to be of use to the public. These assumptions are also based upon the belief that outback/wilderness areas are of more value if roads do not traverse their landscapes.

However, "sense of place is not possessed by everyone in similar manner or like configuration" (Basso, 1996, 84). Thus, the Rock Crawling perspective concerning the same routes is diametrically opposite to that of the preservationist groups:

Trails, essentially, are old roads that have fallen into disrepair. There is a natural progression as these old roads return to nature. They start out smooth and end up rocky, eventually to become impassable. The closer they are to that ultimate state, the more a specialized machine is required to make progress. (Nylund, 104)

Rock Crawlers see these ungraded and extremely rugged paths as a boon, and recoil at the suggestion that they be graded or closed and allowed to grow over.

We all know that we need to protect our trails because they're the only thing we have left and everybody's trying to--you know--get a piece of the property for the pristine quality...We just want to see the country, have the experience. (Allan Olsen, 4/12/1996)

During a 1994 television special covering 4-wheeling in Utah, Rock Crawlers discussed some of these issues with Reece Stein, the news host:

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|---------------|---|
| David Jarvis: | One of the points I've raised with the <i>Forest Service</i> is that <i>their</i> system of roads meets a specific criteria that's based on transportation, and the recreation perspective is a lot different than the transportation perspective.... |
| Jack Nielsen: | It's really hard to get out and designate all of the roads that there are out there that we want to be able to use.   |

- Reese Stein: From a recreational perspective, you may have some goals and some challenges that are not specifically listed on the map. Is that what you're saying?
- Jack Nielsen: I'll say! Yes. There's a lot of opportunities out there that we would like to use that may have been forgotten....
- Loyal Clark: ...One problem we've got is that one person's recreation is another person's devastation.
- Dan Wynkoop: It has to be "multiple use"...different areas for different things. (*Four Wheeling in Utah*, 1994)

It becomes immediately apparent that the basis for judging the quality of a road, and—more importantly—the land through which it passes, varies considerably between these groups. “[Preservationists] find it hard to accept our community's experience and passions, because there is so little in their culture's traditions and ethos to parallel” (David Jarvis, 9/5/1997).<sup>41</sup> A trail that some believe exists as a ruined and forgotten road through nearly pristine wilderness—that should be cordoned off to all motorized transport, presents an exciting challenge that leads to enjoyable back country experiences for others.

One Rock Crawler mentioned a conversation with a preservationist regarding the use of these trails and the land through which they venture:

When I used the term “route” she quickly interjected “ruts.” The rationale for closing those particular routes was: “The ways are expanding and impacting the wilderness quality...People aren't just recreationally 4-wheeling, they are camping there now.” Well no shit! Isn't that what we're expected to do there? I don't suppose there is a *Holiday Inn* nearby. She mentioned that she'd been to a 4-wheel drive clinic in Colorado recently. She needs to attend a few more, she has

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<sup>41</sup> Keith Basso similarly argues that “sense of place is inseparable from the ideas that inform it” (1996, 84).

no clue what 4-wheeling is about or what the attraction to it is.  
(Steven McKague, 9/5/1997)

No attempt is made to hide the sarcasm and agitation arising from this encounter between individuals bearing diametrically opposed views. He concludes his comments with the statement: "They...don't seem to realize that people other than hikers crave solitude and adventure" (9/5/1997). Similarly, another back country explorer has noted: "Just because we are 'trail huggers' doesn't mean we love the land any less" (David Jarvis, 9/22/1997). His comment hinges upon the understanding that most Rock Crawlers call environmentalists "tree huggers."

Such angst is a common occurrence among the Rock Crawlers with whom I have associated and interviewed because they, like the preservationists, believe *their* perspective best "uses" these spaces in a responsible manner. Thus, these different perspectives lead to political and legal clashes, name calling, and even fisticuffs.<sup>42</sup> Anger is common. In fact, during interviews, I came to expect narratives or polemics concerning alledged ill-advised, off-base, or back-handed dealings of "enviro-nazis" and the politicians who are friendly to their cause. Rock Crawlers occasionally circulate rumors about trails that were booby-trapped by preservationist activists. Each group approaches the resulting "land-use" melees confident that their landscape gestalt is correct.

In these battles, Rock Crawlers reveal a problem inherent to their mindset. That is a lack of ability to see eye to eye—or work together with—those holding

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<sup>42</sup> There is always a politics to landscape perceptions. "The political landscape, artificial though it may be, is the realization of an archetype, of a coherent design inspired by philosophy or religion, and it has a distinct purpose in view" (Jackson, 43).

"opposing" views concerning the outback. Many defend their actions by asserting that preservationist communities have taken so much of the outback already, and they will not be satisfied until all of these areas are closed to motorized travel. Whether such statements are true or not, the inability to view the land use problem from another's vantage, or cooperate with folk holding differing views, undoubtedly hurts their efforts at protecting contested lands and legitimizing their continued access to these places.

It is interesting that Rock Crawlers rarely express anger towards extraction-based communities because of the threat their activities present to many outback locations. In fact, old and abandoned mining sites, ranches, and other antiquated extraction-based operations are seen as part of the frontier-West heritage, and are routinely visited on trail rides. During the 1997 *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Labor Day Campout*, a group of participants got together to visit an old mining site on the *Copper Ridge* trail that was believed by them to be active until the 1950's. Individuals scoured the abandoned mining equipment, tailings, and refuse to discover "what it must have been like working up here" (Brian Tanner).

Currently, extraction-based interests have appropriated increasingly more lands used by Rock Crawlers. Oil exploration has cut-off some locations. And many drivers are alarmed at how common it is for land developers to place neighborhoods, business parks, or shopping centers over important trails or recreation areas: 'they won't be happy 'till all of Utah Valley is covered in cement' (comment made by a patron of *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, 9/1997). Rather than blaming the

business concern(s) involved, 4x4 enthusiasts are apt to vent frustration towards the government agency responsible for allowing these groups to commercially enter the recreational area.

Often, the *B.L.M.* is blamed for not properly managing an area. Rock Crawlers feel that they have been sold-out:

What about Public Land Manager's? They hold our future in their hands, yet very few seem to have a clue what 4-wheeling is about! They lazily lump us into an amorphous blob they call "off-roaders." Many bureaucrats seem to use the term as environmentalists do, as a slam! We're a diverse bunch, but there isn't a 'wheeler so crass, or a 'crawler so intense, that he doesn't occasionally stop and hear the quiet peaceful voice of the land! (David Jarvis, 9/22/1997)

Many cannot conceive why such special locations could be allowed to undergo development. Some even hint that a palm might have been greased, or that there might be a "conspiracy" (David Jarvis, 9/22/1997), "hidden agendas...[or even] secret pacts" between the involved parties (Randy Robinson, 9/21/1997). But most importantly, focus is rarely placed upon the individuals or corporations involved.

I fail to understand why extraction group interests have not been perceived as a threat by the Rock Crawling community. Without any specialized study in the area, it is hard to say. But I believe that the main reason for this is because Rock Crawlers primarily focus their attention on the battles involving preservationist groups. They could eventually wake-up to the fact that it has not been "tree huggers"--objects of their scapegoating--who closed off the majority of the back country, but the relentless expansion of the urban world, and its accompanying consumption (of which they are a part) that appropriated it for other needs.

## CONCLUSION

Rock Crawlers esteem the public lands of the West as recreational zones, places where they can escape, experience difficult or dangerous activities, and view a "pure environment" (Wilson, 22). These same values are shared by other recreational communities. Still other groups, not centered upon the recreational perspective, also value these spaces. The socio-political climate surrounding public lands also involves extraction and preservation perspectives.

The differences in these views inherently lead to "land grab" battles that inevitably decide what communities can and what communities cannot access the land (<http://www.suwa.org/faqpart4.html#roads>). They also decide what can and cannot be done on these spaces. These grabs often lead to "battles in Congress" to decide their outcome (<http://www.suwa.org/faqpart4.html#roads>). When the battles reach this point, the decisions are "up to people who are *not even* from Utah" to make the final rulings (trailside comment, *Hell's Revenge* trail, 1996):

These people—for the most part—are not people who live near [these] areas; they're people who really don't understand the issues, have never been in and around those [areas], nor will they ever be. (Randy Robinson, 9/21/1997)

These decisions are also reputed to have been made "by some bureaucrat in Washington" (trailside comment, *Hell's Revenge* trail, 1996).

The social and political activity surrounding these locations reaffirms the assertion that Western landscapes mean many things to many people (Wilson, 19-52). And it is within this multifaceted climate that Rock Crawlers must find a place--



physically and socially--to enjoy the outback. Their desire to "get out of the city and...get up in the hills" pulls them to these places for relaxation and excitement; these desires additionally become a rallying cry in defence of what they feel is their right as westerners (Victor Mokler, 1/21/1997). They believe that public lands--outback spaces--are to be enjoyed in a *multiple use* sense. Traditional Rock Crawler interpretations of "multiple use" imply that a diversity of groups, primarily recreational, must have access to these spaces so as to experience them in the way they deem meaningful. This belief often leads community members to side with extraction-based groups, often large corporate ventures which could also appropriate these places, against anti-multiple use preservationists.

For Rock Crawlers, enjoying the back country to its fullest means experiencing the land through the three means discussed as part of the recreational perspective: *refuge*, *prospect*, and *hazard*. Whether a location offers "really pretty" vistas (Shannon Shirk, 4/21/1996), a chance "to get away, get away from the people...[for a] different feeling" (Allan Olsen, 4/12/1996), or "*extreme* ups and *extreme* downs...something that's technically challenging" (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996), or even a combination of all three, each trail ride takes participants into a zone that is important because of the perceived benefits that it has for the individuals on the ride. Such perceived benefits become reality because the community bases its experience and interaction, both human/human and human/environmental, upon these beliefs while within these places.

Chapter two will focus upon how Rock Crawlers bound and separate outback

locations from their surrounding landscapes. That is, entire deserts or mountain ranges are not conceptualized or dealt-with as "back country." Rather, the territory extending out and away from the trails a group travels is mentally mapped as these culturally important zones. Essentially these places are cognitively carved from their surrounding topography by the group. The following discussion examines the process by which these spaces are appropriated and transformed into these culturally significant places.

## DESIGNATING AND USING THE OUTBACK

The machine which at first blush seems a means of isolating man from the great problems of nature, actually plunges him more deeply into them. (Antoine de Saint-Exupery)

This chapter discusses the process by which Rock Crawlers establish and access outback spaces. These are special zones which are culturally defined and designated as locations for rock crawling activities. Their unique status is a construct, created through the "experiences" engendered within those venturing inside their bounds (Tuan, 1975, 152). As such, they are not unnamed and unfamiliar blank slates through which people drive. Rather, they are known and understood "centers of meaning" for the community (152). As a culturally defined and bounded space, each outback location acts as a catalyst. Trail rides entering those spaces become a "dynamic fusion of landscape, [vehicles], and [participants]" (Hufford, 1992, 27).

Back country places are important because of their emotional effect, which results from this fusion. For Rock Crawlers, "viewing a favored site...may loosen strong emotions" (Basso, 1996, 54). Seeing a photograph of *The Golden Crack*,

Quinn Mortensen once told me the story of his first crossing that obstacle. He then moved into a narrative concerning the entire ride across the *Golden Spike* trail, of which "the crack" is a part (F map 2). He has a framed photo of himself crossing *The Golden Crack*, in his Bronco, on a bedside table in his bedroom. Such actions are common among Rock Crawlers, attesting to the importance of these culturally "structured" locations (Casey, 15).

The following discussion will first focus upon the outback as a place that has been bounded and carved from the surrounding topography through a process involving the "names which people apply" to it (Ryden, 78). As will be examined, the act of naming spaces creates a culturally significant place where one may not have existed before (78-9). These names may result from a familiarity with the form of the land, or they may result from experiences on a given space (Ryden, 38). This system of names, applied to the outback, helps to lay a culturally relevant mental map over the existing landscape (19-52).

To many people, map making brings images of surveyors and cartographers, not people recreationally driving 4x4s through the desert or mountains. This perception is common because people rarely notice that maps exist in people's minds and influence daily life, often as powerfully as those existing in printed forms (Downs & Stea, 70). This process can be described as the mental operation by which people or communities perceive or understand the world around them. These "maps" form "a person's organized representation...of [their] spatial environment" (61). This complex process, translates information gleaned from that spatial environment into a comprehensible "representation" so that the individual can use

and rely upon it in future situations (62).

This map-making process creates an "outback" place out of land that may not have been viewed as such before. Such culturally specific "cognitive maps" may not coincide with "official" cartographic records (Ryden, 54; Downs & Stea, 99-102).<sup>1</sup> Boundaries may not agree. Meaningful places may not be noted on official records. These cultural maps are, nevertheless, very real for the community holding them.

Having covered the concept of mental maps, the discussion will then focus upon these places as a means for escaping the urban setting. Rock Crawlers enter the outback to depart from the normal activities of the work-a-day world. These notions are rife with contradictions. One such clash is the act of taking vehicles into "pristine" outback places to enjoy these locations. How community members make sense of such conflicting ideologies reveals their values regarding how land should be used, and their view concerning the place of humans and technology in these environments. These negotiations, in turn, affect how the group interacts with the land and relates to their vehicles.

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<sup>1</sup> A recent magazine article commented upon this dynamic, see Wickham's "Where is Hardcore Heaven?: It's Not on Any Street Map!"

## TOPONYMS: DESIGNATING THE OUTBACK?

Understanding the difference between *space* and *place* is important to this discussion. By *space*, I mean a "neutral, pre-given medium, a *tabula rasa* onto which the peculiarities of culture and history come to be inscribed" (Casey, 14). Essentially, a *space* is a location that acts as a blank slate onto which a culture or group projects its emotions and values. (I doubt that a fully "blank slate" ever truly exists. Let us work from the assumption that these locations lay open to cultural interpretation.) By way of comparison, *places* are those spaces which have been imbued with meaning.<sup>3</sup> They are given a "distinctive character" in relation to the space around them (Bale, 127). Thus, all places are the result of "projection" (14-15). As such they have been transformed into meaningful and/or representative locations.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the process Rock Crawlers undertake to create back country places is important. Key to this understanding is realizing the importance of the locations in the Rock Crawler's world. For them, "the ideal landscape is the 'middle region,' the [back country] lies between the chaos of the city and the chaos of the wilderness;" this is imperative because it is these in-between territories to which

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow the term *toponym* from Keith Basso's "'Speaking with Names': Language and Landscape Among the Western Apache."

<sup>3</sup> John Bale notes: "Places are significant, not because of their inherent value, but rather because we assign value to them" (122).

<sup>4</sup> For an ethnography discussing these issues see: Hufford, 1986.

Rock Crawlers venture (Tuan, 1971, 35). And they are labelled the *outback*, or the *back country*. Such places are middle regions because they are neither a part of the urban world nor are they the unabated wilderness. Studying the names given to the land by Rock Crawlers provides clues as to how they transform the wilderness into these middle regions.

Ethnographer Keith Basso relates an experience he had while trying to understand the Apache perceptions and values concerning their landscape. He reached an impasse, unable to comprehend a system that to non-Apaches seemed wholly arcane. Nick Thompson, one of his primary informants, told him: "Learn the names of all these places" (1983, 24). Basso spent long hours scrutinizing maps, walking the terrain, and talking to locals about the nomenclature of these locations. He discovered that learning the names applied to the countryside provided insight into the Apache mind that he could have gained in no other way. For these Apaches, place names catalog information; they hold stories for the community. The names evoke culturally shared histories, images, and emotions.

The name system helps local Apaches to create and order a cultural place out of the topography in which they live. In effect, a cultural "blanket" is laid over the landscape, making it more than the sum of its names. Such processes are a vital part of Apache life and history (23-5). They are also important to Rock Crawlers.

The act of naming is a means for "appropriating physical environments" (Basso, 1988, 102).<sup>5</sup> This propensity to "claim by naming" is part of a process by

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<sup>5</sup> See also: Basso, 1996, 83.

which communities make these spaces relevant to themselves (Brady, 138-51).<sup>6</sup> Place names reveal a "consciousness and a sense of...distinctive place, especially when they are names such as are not found on maps or in standard reference books" (Ryden, 78). Such specialized names can range from references to specific areas to terms designating broad localities. Often, groups have a "code name" for their region whose full range of meaning and nuance will be lost on the uninitiated" (78-9). For Rock Crawlers, such code names can be found in the terms "outback" and "back country." The names designate certain areas as special; they also imbue those using the terms with a special in-group identity.

Names have a more powerful function than mere designation; they have the power to convert the discordant world into the ordered zones comprising the cognitive map that is carried in group members' minds (Ryden, 54). This process separates space that was previously unimportant from its surrounding world, transforming it into culturally significant places. In effect, these places are mentally bounded within the minds of those who understand their significance. In this way, the back country "is...a human construction...Like a set of maps laid over the earth, [Rock Crawler's] ideas about [the back country] are already out there on the land itself as [they] move around it" (Wilson, 124).

Rock crawlers are not alone in the act of designating places by naming them. "The particular things we value may be given names" (Tuan, 1977, 18). Because of this, there is a human tendency to convert such special spaces into places by

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the creation of place through naming and language usage, see: Yi-Fu Tuan. "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach."



giving them names (29-30). Ancient locations are often specially marked (with plaques or signs) to create historical places that would have previously gone unnoticed (Lowenthal, 265). The naming, in itself, creates a special place where none may have been recognized before.<sup>7</sup> Such "designation locates the antiquity on our mental map and lends it status; the signpost heralding its age also distinguishes it from present-day surroundings" (265).

Native American place names in New England are also relevant to this discussion. Long before the arrival of the Puritans, the native populace utilized place names that described specific locations and their importance to the community: "Names [told] where plants could be gathered, shellfish collected, mammals hunted, and fish caught" (Cronon, 65). Names often described what flora, fauna, or topographic features were prevalent at a given spot. The point is that names were attached to specific locations on the landscape;<sup>8</sup> these designations did more than just name locations—they created cultural places where none had previously existed.

Naming a space gives it veracity, makes it concrete. Once a name has been assigned to a plot of land, it becomes separate from the expanses around it. "The purpose of such names [for native communities] was to turn the landscape into a

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<sup>7</sup> In an article detailing how genealogical associations are used to create cultural place Barbara Allen notes: "When people of Rock Bridge look around them, they see the landscape as a complex web of human lives lived on it; they see, in other words, a genealogical landscape" (156).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth M. Thomas notes similar activities among the Gikwe Bushmen of the African Kalahari desert. She states: The Bushmen "have usually named every place...where a certain kind of...food may grow, even if that place is only a few yards in diameter, or where there is only a patch of tall grass or a bee tree...In this way...people [know] many hundreds of places by name" (10).

map which, if studied carefully, literally gave a village's inhabitants the information they needed to sustain themselves...Indians used ecological labels to describe how the land could be used" (Cronon, 65-6).

The practice of creating space by naming it is directly relevant to rock crawling. In a process similar to that undertaken by the Native Americans of New England, who designated culturally important locations according to the food or commodities they provided, and historical preservationists, who create heritage sites by raising brass plaques, Rock Crawlers bound outback spaces from the surrounding wilderness by assigning names to topographic locations. These locations can be the trails themselves, physical challenges occurring along trails, or they can refer to landscape formations through which the trail passes.

The naming process creates a map that is used in several ways. As previously stated, these cultural landscapes are no longer the chaos of the city or the wilderness, but a third zone of "stability" (Tuan, 1977, 29). They are unique for the people who have the culturally determined "invisible landscape" in their heads (Ryden, 41). These maps are "symbolically constituted, socially transmitted and individually applied" (Basso, 1988, 100). This means that only members of the community may recognize, understand, or even value these locations for the significance *they* apply to them. In the case of Rock Crawlers, outsiders often fail to distinguish such "maps" or their significance.

Many non-Rock Crawlers believe that community members crave the opportunity to wantonly drive their vehicles over or through any landscape that is not a paved road. During a 1996 *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* meeting that occurred shortly

after the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, club members griped about the negative media attention that the event had received in the press. One member expressed anger at the Salt Lake City television news crews. According to him, they portrayed the exploits of the "mid-term break college kids" as safari activities, yet failed to show any of those related to the Rock Crawlers. Club members felt that the media had not bothered to distinguish between the two groups using the town of Moab as a locus for activity.<sup>9</sup>

In many club members' estimations, outback locations seemed to non-Rock Crawlers as randomly designated—or newly created as a vehicles' wheels push over the local flora. Matt Smith has described these stereotypical images as depicting "Yahoo Jeepers...beating the shit out of their rigs, and not caring much what they do." He has also noted that "people see Rock Crawlers [as people who] run pell-mell all over the terrain" (4/4/1996).

However, for Rock Crawlers, back country spaces are not used for random driving (such drivers are called "thrashers"); these locations are, instead, ordered, stable, and self-evident places. These locations have been culturally set aside for the specific purpose of driving along the trails.<sup>10</sup> Driving outside of these locations, or acting incorrectly while within their bounds is taboo. We will see that these

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<sup>9</sup> Ber Knight, information officer for the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers*, noted that the advent of partying college kids during spring break (which is at the same time as the *Jeep Safari*) is new to Moab. This new type of crowd is now coming to Moab due to "police crackdowns" in St. George, Utah, the traditional spring break location for Utah. (5/12/1996)

<sup>10</sup> For more on the designation of spaces for specific purposes, see: Downs & Stea, 64-5.

spaces continue to exist *because* of their order, not in spite of it.

Two recently built trails provide evidence of cultural map-making process in action. *Victor Valley 4-Wheelers*, a California-based club, wanted to build a trail that would be recognized as the most challenging route available. New trails are rarely constructed now--most are pioneer or mining trails 50 to 100 years old. In accordance with the law, club members asked the *Bureau of Land Management* (BLM\*) for permission to use a section of raw "high desert" in remote Southern California (Rick Russell, *Sledgehammer* video). Once the O.K. was given, the club began construction. The building process took "just under five months...just under eleven-hundred working hours" to complete (Chuck Shaner, *Sledgehammer* video). Essentially, trail construction entails moving rocks and natural debris around--by hand or with the winches mounted to the 4x4s--until the location is capable of supporting vehicular travel.

During its construction the trail was designated *Sledgehammer* (F map 1). It was dubbed with this name because "Gary Brown was up here with his Cherokee...And on one of the rough parts he kicked out a rock with his rear wheel--left rear wheel--and it just went over and it caved-in his door. So he says, 'I'm not going to sledgehammer this through here no more.' The name kinda stuck" (Chuck Shaner, *Sledgehammer* video).

This narrow strip, running along a boulder-strewn wash between two desert mountains is now a location known by many Rock Crawlers. Families come from as far as North Dakota and Arkansas to visit this trail, which is less than a mile long and

often takes more than ten hours to complete. This previously unknown location in the desert has been transformed into a specific cultural place. Non-Rock Crawlers viewing a videotape of a group traversing the area say that it is wholly "undistinguishable as a trail" (3/1997) (fig: 2.1). The boulders are as big as the rigs climbing them(!), and the desert seems too harsh, hot, and uninviting. They expressed disbelief that a vehicle could even complete such difficulties. To Rock Crawlers, however, this is a spot of fun and adventure for family and friends. In fact, Rock Crawlers have dubbed the area where Sledgehammer—and its sibling trails, *Jackhammer*, *Clawhammer* and *Sunbonnet Pass*—is located *Hardcore Heaven*.

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**FIG: 2.1** In his Jeep entitled "Romancing the Stone," Jim Cole climbs over a boulder and through the rocks on *Sledgehammer*. (This rig was destroyed during a roll-over at the 1998 Moab Easter Jeep Safari. Luckily, Jim was unhurt, and had a new Jeep under construction within a month.) (Courtesy Jim Cole)

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Encouraged by the success of *Sledgehammer*, Victor Valley 4-Wheelers decided to build a "sister" trail. A similar permission process was undertaken through the *Bureau of Land Management* to build the *Jackhammer* trail in a nearby

desert "arroyo"<sup>11</sup> (Chuck Shaner, *Sledgehammer* video). This trail was already named prior to completion. Rumors flew about the possibilities of this new and more unforgiving challenge. Several customers of *Mountain West Off-Road Supply* came to the store to ask if we could give them directions to "that new place near *Sledgehammer*" (F map 1). People did not know its exact location, but it already beckoned as a point of importance. Not long after it was finished, tales filtered back to Utah about its alleged difficulty. More people came in to ask where it was; they wanted to drive it. Even though they had not yet seen this new trail, it already existed as a space of cultural significance.

In central Utah, Quinn Mortensen and Matt Smith began frequenting a series of trails in the mountains north of Provo. One day they asked if I would like to accompany them on a trail ride into *The Valley of the Kings* (F map 1). I was not aware of such a trail, or of a place bearing this name, and asked them about it. They informed me that this was the name *they* had given to a trail they had recently found, and to the lush valley through which it passed. By placing their own denotation on this area, they had created place (Basso, 1988, 103). It was a location which they could mentally chart, discuss, or venture into. For them—and now for me—this space was separated from the landscape around it; it was a bounded and "articulated" location (Tuan, 1977, 83).

Naming the valley provided a stability and veracity that it previously lacked. Like saying, "Let's go to my house," Quinn or Matt could say to people in their circle

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<sup>11</sup> Arroyos are steep sided (desert) gulches and watercourses with relatively flat floors. They are usually dry except after heavy rains, when they are prone to flash floods.

of friends, "Let's go to *The Valley of the Kings*," and there was no mistake about where they desired to go. The name also conjured specific images for those familiar with it. It was now a cultural place for those friends of Quinn and Matt.

Many of the trails surrounding Moab, Utah, have been given names by Rock Crawlers. One trail opened and named by them within the last ten years is the *Golden Spike* (F maps 1, 2). This trail, because of its wonderful vistas and brutal difficulty,<sup>12</sup> has become a favorite. Rock Crawlers from around the west are familiar with this trail.

But names designating trails are not assigned solely by the members of this group. Often trails have existed for years and are still referred to by names originally given them. The *Hole in the Rock* trail was named by the Mormon settlers who made the trail roughly 100 years ago as they ventured into the desert, building new towns as part of their planned theocratic state, Deseret (F map 1). Many other trails, such as *Poison Spider Mesa*, *Copper Ridge*, *Moab Rim*, *Strike Ravine*, *Flat Iron Mesa*, and others, were given their names by explorers and miners from the frontier West's mining years, or by their followers during the Cold War uranium boom (F map 2). Like Quinn and Matt's *Valley of the Kings*, these trail names help to delineate socially constructed places. They "conjure" images and places in the southern Utah desert that have specific value for those utilizing them (Hufford, 1992, 8).

But names can be more specific than mere trail designations. Specific places along a trail are given names. For instance, topographic spaces that are challenging

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<sup>12</sup> Ten percent of all vehicles attempting this trail experience serious break-downs and must be towed out by the other members of their group.

to the vehicles are also named. Concerning rough sections of the trails surrounding Moab, Utah, writer/Rock Crawler Rick Pewe, notes: "Most of the famous obstacles have names such as *Butt Scratcher*, *Metal Masher* and *White Knuckle*, most of which are self-explanatory once you've made it through the trail" (79, italics added)



**FIG: 2.2** Victor Mokler descends *White Knuckle Hill*, a five foot near-vertical drop. The obstacle gets its name from drivers tightly gripping their steering wheels as they ascend or descend. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)

(fig: 2.2). Through this process a trail becomes a linking of many specific sites, not merely a single extended one. Giving names to these challenges creates a specific map which is subsumed under the general name of the trail. For instance, *Golden Spike* trail has many locations, a few of which are named: *Zuk's Hill*, *The Golden Crack*, *The Wall*, *The Launching Pad*, *The Golden Steps*, *Double Whammy* (fig: 2.3). "Those are the famous places on that trail" (Quinn Mortensen, 6/26/1997). When any of these locations are discussed, speakers assume that others know that these



locations are part of "The 'Spike.'" Such places are as common to Rock Crawlers that frequent Moab as the "three-point line" is to basketball fans and players. Community members do not usually feel a need to note the locations of these places, the trails they are part of are tacitly assumed.<sup>13</sup>

Like trail names, these designated locations create culturally relevant places. Names like *Double Whammy*, *the Wedgie*, *White Knuckle Hill*, *Devil's Crack*, *the Golden Crack*, *Potato Salad Hill*, *The Rock Pile*, and others are challenges known to exist at specific locations on outback, mental, and social maps (figs: 2.3-2.7). Their names elicit images, stories, descriptions of the challenge, and emotions felt among those who have driven them—or those who plan to.

Sunday found us up early, and on the trail by 8:30 AM with some really tough obstacles almost immediately. First was the *head wall*, which was basically a sheer sandstone wall about 8 or 9 feet tall, and very steep. It was more scary looking than actually hard to do. (Ed Isaacson, trail journal, September 4-6, 1993, italics added)

What's happened here recently is we had [an] experience...that you just—I mean—you couldn't believe it'd happen. When [we] went through the *Golden Crack*—on the *Golden Spike*<sup>14</sup>—I mean—normally you put one or two wheels up in the air, maybe at the same time! And there's a tremendous distance of drop there. But when I went through that first time with this Jeep as it's now set-up...it just went through! I mean it was smooth...It just went through it like it was a little bump in the road or something. And it was just *totally* amazing to me. (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996)

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<sup>13</sup> A culture's most fundamental beliefs are often so widely understood, so generally shared and accepted, that they never need to be stated (Prown, 1993, 3).

<sup>14</sup> Jim notes the trail that the *Golden Crack* is on because he is being interviewed "for non-Rock Crawlers." Note how he stops a minute to regain thoughts after noting the trail, a comment that he would not normally have made to me.

Many of these challenges are locations for rites of passage.<sup>15</sup> For instance, claiming that you climbed *The Rock Pile*, *White Knuckle Hill* or *Potato Salad Hill* gives you immediate social status because of their acknowledged difficulty. Climbing these obstacles designates an uncanny driver/vehicle unity. Not all drivers can succeed at these challenges. Consequently, making it through such places brings one into an elite body of drivers. Individuals alleging that they frequent Moab's desert, but who do not know these locations, would *not* be taken seriously. How, reason Rock Crawlers, could a person say they know the Moab back country and not know these places?

Other such trail locations near Moab are *Mickey's Hot Tub* and *The Waterfall*. Drivers first successfully attempting these challenges were involved in their naming processes. *Mickey's Hot Tub*, located on the *Golden Spike Trail*, is a 15 to 20 foot deep depression within a slickrock section on the trail (fig: 2.5). Its near-vertical walls combine with a bottom area barely longer than a Jeep to provide a challenge which is mental as well as physical. Additionally, the bottom is occasionally filled with water, adding a lack of tire traction to the equation.

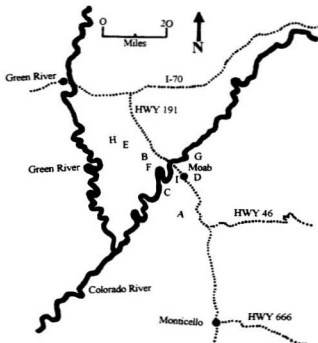
This awe-inspiring challenge was first attempted by Dan Mick, then President of the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers*. After he and his well known flame-job painted Jeep negotiated this challenge, others followed. In respect for Mick's initial attempt, drivers named it after him, adding the challenge's physical aspects (hot tub) into the designation as well.

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of trails as locations for ritual activity, see chapter five.

## MOAB TRAIL OBSTACLES:

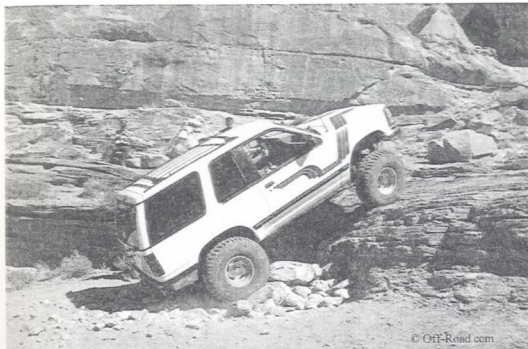
Broken Steps (C)  
Devil's Crack (I)  
Double Whammy (B)  
Dump-Bump (D)  
Frenchie's Fin (G)  
Golden Crack (B)  
Golden Steps (B)  
High Dive (A)  
Launching Pad (B)  
Lion's Back (D)  
Metal Masher (E)  
Micky's Hot Tub (D)  
Mother In-Law Hill (E)  
Potato Salad Hill (D)  
Rock Chucker Hill (E)  
Rocker Knocker (C)  
The Rock Pile (C)  
Tip-Over Challenge (D)  
Upchuck Hill (A)  
The Wall (B)  
The Waterfall (C)  
The Wedge (B / F)  
White Knuckle Hill (A)  
Widow Maker (E)  
Wipe-Out Hill (H)  
Yellow Hill (C)  
Z-Turn (I)  
Zuk's Hill (B)



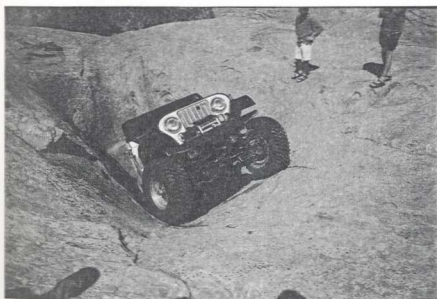
## TRAILS THEY WHERE THEY OCCUR:

A: Behind the Rocks	B: Golden Spike	C: Pritchett Canyon
D: Hell's Revenge	E: Metal Masher	F: Poison Spider Mesa
G: Fins 'N' Things	H: Wipe-Out Hill	I: Moab Rim

FIG: 2.3 Moab trails and their well-known challenges.



**FIG: 2.4** A Ford Explorer attempts *Pritchett Canyon* trail's *Rock Pile*. Less than half the vehicles succeed at this challenge. Drivers who cannot make it are winched up by those who can. (Courtesy of [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))



**FIG: 2.5** A Jeep climbs out of *Mickey's Hot Tub*. (Courtesy of Jim Broadbent)



FIG: 2.6 *Behind the Rocks* trail: Jim Broadbent descends *White Knuckle Hill*. (Courtesy of Jim Broadbent)



FIG: 2.7 Charlie Copsey crosses the *Golden Crack*, on the *Golden Spike* trail. (Courtesy Chris Stephens)

*The Waterfall*, on the *Pritchett Canyon* trail, got its name from a group—among them Dan Wynkoop and Chris Stephens—when they first discovered it in 1994. Also nearly vertical, this challenge is a ten foot tall wall of smooth rock. After returning from a trip to Moab, Dan told his friends in the Provo-Orem area about this new discovery. He had taken pictures—which he brandished—to show what it looked like (figs: 2.3, 2.8). He described it as: “There is no water running over its edge, but it looks like water should be there” [my recollection].<sup>16</sup>



FIG: 2.8 Dan Wynkoop climbs *The Waterfall* as fellow participants look-on. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)

As people took their friends to the spot, it was quickly added to the Moab outback “map.” “Word-of-mouth” information travels quickly. *The Waterfall* was

<sup>16</sup> Steep drop-offs are often called “waterfalls” regardless of the presence or lack of water.

soon added as an option<sup>17</sup> to the *Jeep Safari's Pritchett Canyon* trail rides. It appeared in several magazine photos not long after.

Formations along outback trails can also be named. These nomenclatures may also bleed to the formations' surrounding area, giving the general locale a designation. The *Salt Creek* trail, which runs through a canyon in *Canyonlands National Park*, south of Moab, takes its name from the creek which it follows, and through which it continually crosses (F map 1). This trail ends at *Angel Arch*, a large formation resembling a praying angel, with wings spreading from its back (fig: 2.9). *Angel Arch* was the destination of a trail ride into the *Salt Creek* canyon trail on June, 21, 1997. It was also the location for drivers to exit their vehicles, hike, rest, or grab a bite to eat.

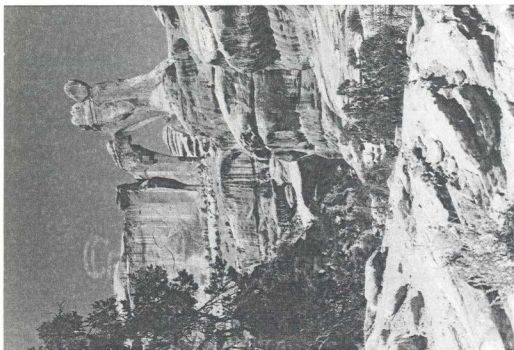
The *Golden Spike* trail boasts one series of sandstone steps along the trail which have been dubbed *Double Whammy*. They take their name from the effect that their *form* has upon rigs attempting to climb them.

Double Whammy is a set of slickrock stairs perfectly tuned to the wheelbase of a CJ-7, a Wrangler, a Land Cruiser, or a Bronco—tuned for challenge, that is. Both the front and the rear wheels hit the steep ledges at the same time, so a lot of hopping, bouncing, and breaking occurs. (Freiburger, 36)

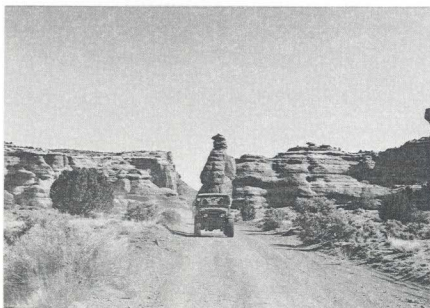
On the *Gold Bar Rim* trail, just north of Moab, there is a large stone monolith called the *Goony Bird* (fig: 2.10). The formation takes its name from its shape, which resembles a large bird. People following this trail often correlate trail ride progress

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<sup>17</sup> As an option, drivers are free to bypass the challenge if they feel that they or their vehicle is not up to the challenge.



**FIG: 2.9** *Angel Arch* is a sandstone formation at the end of *Salt Creek* trail. (Courtesy Quinn Mortensen)



**FIG: 2.10** A Toyota Land Cruiser drives past *Goony Bird*, on the *Gold Bar Rim* trail.



or position according to their relationship to the *Goony Bird* formation.

It is not uncommon that such formations are made relevant through a “folk history” or “quasi-history” (Ryden, 84). In this way “history is the essence of the idea of place” (64). Essentially, the names for such places link Rock Crawlers with an in-group history, or at least a history that is felt to be of special relevance to the community. “The worst [obstacle] was ‘Frenchie’s Fin,’ that was named for our trail leader [Frenchie LaChance]” (Ed Isaacson, trail journal, *Moab Jeep Safari*: 1992) (fig: 2.3).

Other places with names that resound with folk histories are *Rock Chucker Hill* on the *Metal Masher* trail, and the *Rock Pile*, on *Pritchett Canyon* trail. The *Rock Chucker* obstacle is optional (figs: 2.11, 2.12), meaning a **chicken route\*** takes those who do not want to try it around. “We think it’s called [*Rock Chucker*] because many 4x4s require some road-building to get to the top—similar to *The Rock Pile* near the end of the *Pritchett Canyon Trail*. Looks plain vertical to us” (Freiburger, 42, italics added). *Rock Chucker*, like the *Rock Pile*, is *believed* to take its name from the fact that drivers must “chuck” rocks into a pile at the bottom of the obstacle to make it up.

“The [outback] landscape resounds for [Rock Crawlers] with narratives of collective history and personal experience. It provides tangible forms for the mooring of memory” (Kahn, 167). For instance, on the *Golden Spike* trail there is a relatively steep slickrock hill called *Zuk’s Hill* or *Zuki Hill*. This hill, which previously bore no name, was given its current designation after Ken Fransisco, alias “Zuk” (because

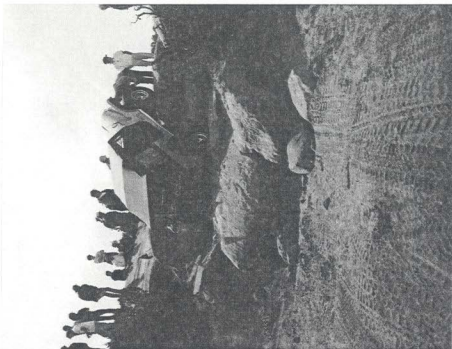


FIG: 2.11 A Jeep attempts to climb *Rock Chucker* during the 1998 Moab Easter Jeep Safari.



FIG: 2.12 The same Jeep, during its attempt up *Rock Chucker Hill*.

of his modified Suzuki Samurai), rolled his rig while trying to climb its steep face.<sup>18</sup> Participants on trail rides know the history of the spot, or learn about its name by hearing the story of Zuk's roll.

Other locations bear histories that have no relation to Rock Crawling at all, yet their names elicit emotions for those in-group members whose "cognitive maps" contain these sites (Ryden, 54-6). For instance, slickrock itself has a folk history that describes its name:

Moab is best known for...slickrock, or petrified sand....Interestingly enough slickrock isn't slick—even when it's wet, it offers plenty of traction for rubber tires. The nickname is believed to have originated because the sandstone didn't offer much traction to the wood-and-steel-treaded tires of the first vehicles to roll over the area. (Quinnell, 1997b, 54)

Other versions of this story focus on cowboys rather than pioneers. These histories allege that the term originated due to the horseshoes of cowboys' horses slipping on the smooth sandstone.

Specific locations also take their names from these informal histories. In his trail journal, Ed Isaacson notes the history of the *Grey Mesa* section of the *Hole in the Rock* trail (F map 1):

We had a quick dinner and then Harley invited those who were interested to go for a hike up to Grey Mesa to see a portion of the wagon trail the jeeps could not go on. We hiked up the area where the pioneers had actually blasted a trail in the sandstone, and could see steps they had cut in the rock and could see wagon ruts in the sandstone. And at the top of the mesa we saw the remnants of an old wagon. It was very impressive, and made you really appreciate the hardships those people encountered. (Labor Day Campout, 9/4-6/1993)

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<sup>18</sup> Jan Brunvand comments upon history as the impetus for place-names (65-6).

For Ed and the other trail ride participants, much of the trail's significance comes from the history they associate with that specific locale. For many Rock Crawlers, "feelings arise...from a knowledge of place-based history and identity...which inevitably tinge[s] their contemplation of their [outback] surroundings" (Ryden, 66).<sup>19</sup>

The idea that Rock Crawlers mentally create places which, for their culture, exist apart from the surrounding topography, is imperative to grasping the significance of the back country. These are communally constructed areas of social importance. They are no longer the deep and dark unknown of the "wilderness," but neither are they the urban sprawl. By naming these trails and their specific locations Rock Crawlers blanket the wilderness in a cognitive map, creating a new world existing outside the one in which they live their daily lives. These spaces function on both localized (specific challenges: *Mickey's Hot Tub*) and general (trail names: *Pritchett Canyon*) levels to segregate the "outback" from its surrounding topography. As they are neither city, nor raw wilderness, they are analogous to what Tuan has deemed a "middle region" (1971, 35).

## THE OUTBACK AS RETREAT

Since we have discussed how the outback has been set apart from its surrounding topography in the minds of those who use it, we also must comment on

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<sup>19</sup> Miriam Kahn notes that culturally significant "landscape[s] surround the people with a sense of shared history rooted in the past and memorialized in the present through shared symbols. It provides a sense of common identity" (178).

the purpose it serves for them. For most Rock Crawlers, the outback exists as a place of escape, a place to relax and be with family and friends. Basically outback locations represent a "complete diversion from what we do every day...a change of pace" (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996).<sup>20</sup>

On July 2, 1997, Ed Isaacson talked about a decision that he and his family had to make for the upcoming July 4th weekend. They had been invited to attend three different activities: (1) a rugged trail ride in Moab, (2) to go on a camping/fishing trip in Wyoming, or (3) to enjoy various water sports in Flaming Gorge, a large lake in northeastern Utah. For the family, all choices were *equally* enticing. Each offered the family a chance to enjoy being together, while being outdoors and escaping the urban scene.

Since the outback is set aside as a place of "refuge," logic dictates that something must exist to necessitate such an escape (Bale, 122). Essentially, "an environmental value requires its antithesis for definition...the virtues of the countryside require their anti-image, the city, for the sharpening of focus, and vice versa" (Tuan, 1971, 102). Glenn Wakefield has noted the escapist qualities imparted to the back country: "[It]...helps me forget about stresses of everyday life" (10/29/1996). Others concur with his view:

Escaping: I go 'wheeling to get away from all the crap I have to deal with...here. Work, crime, crowded cities, trash and litter, paying rent, worrying about how I'm gonna get the money to pay whatever. It's a good way for me to hook up with people...who have similar interests and go have fun...Looking at all the old cabins and mines and what not, and wondering what it might have been like living up there

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<sup>20</sup> For more on landscapes as places of refuge, see: Bale, 122-25.

seventy-five or one-hundred years ago. It's just a sanity check for me.  
(Victor Mokler, 2/5/1997)

During interviews and conversations others routinely noted similar reasons for venturing into the back country.

There is a propensity for dividing the landscape into a dichotomous relationship, polarized between urban life and the outback's benefits. Such tendencies are similar to those that have been called "pastoralism;" they

have a long history in Western culture. It promotes a view of nature as a kindly mother, a refuge from the demands of urban life. The Earth, in this view, is a garden of Eden, generous and fertile. Mother Earth provides us with food, rest, diversion, and solace" (Wilson, 94).

It has been noted that "the countryside is widely accepted as the antithesis of the city irrespective of the actual living conditions of these two environments" (Tuan, 1971, 109). The propensity for thus dividing a region's topography has been referred to as "nostalgia" (Raymond Williams, 47).<sup>21</sup> Viewed through this mentality, urban centers are seen as being filled with:

organised seduction,...noise and traffic, with the streets unsafe because of robbers...the city as itself: going its own way. A retreat to [the back] country...from this kind of hell, is then a different vision from the mere contrast of rural and urban ways of life. It is, of course, a rentier's vision: the cool [back] country that is sought is not that of the work[er] but as the fortunate resident. (46-7)

It is interesting how this description of the urban world and its opposite, the back country, comes close to that noted above by Victor. Thus, the outback is transformed into a diversion, a place of recreation and escape.

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Slotkin has similarly noted the propensity for people to polarize their world into two realms, "metropolis" and "wilderness" (41).

Drawing such notions into the modern, technological sphere, scholars have observed that:

The love of nature flourishes best in cultures with highly developed technologies, for nature is the one place we can both indulge our dreams of mastery over the earth and seek some kind of contact with the origins of life—an experience we don't usually allow urban settings to provide. (Wilson, 25)

The veracity of this comment can be measured within the Rock Crawling culture by noting that the majority of the community hail from sizeable urban centers like Los Angeles, Denver, or Salt Lake City. However, smaller urban locations like Grand Junction, Colorado, cannot be left from the equation. They also produce drivers and builders of 4x4s. However, rural Rock Crawlers are a rare site; there are even fewer rancher or farmer members of the community.

During the course of my ongoing research at Moab and other trail ride events from the late eighties and nineties to the present, I have met less than a handful of serious participants from rural areas. Once again, this is because "the idea of [the outback] as an untrammelled refuge is most attractive to [groups] situated at some distance from [this] world, and whose values tend to rest on a rigid distinction between human and non-human" populated locations (Wilson, 27). In this sense, back country spaces are places that are Other, defined as such against notions of urban existence (181).

Outback spaces, then, are lands standing in contrast to the urban sprawl, "the chaos of the metro," and the hectic lifestyle it engenders (Raymond Williams, 5). Essentially the outback takes its significance from drawing one's mind away from that which is perceived as urban to any great degree. Consequently, the two

physical states "stand for" and thus provide opposing experiences (1).<sup>22</sup> The urban sprawl is hectic and congested, the back country exists as a symbolic antithesis:

Despite all the mis-perceptions of 4-wheelers as being interested in rape and pillage of the wilderness, you know they—they're looking for things which you define as recreation, if you want. But, it's basically to escape the tyranny of a modern-day rat race. And, if you want to do that, then you have to—have something that soaks up enough of your consciousness to take precedence over the other things in your life that you want to escape. Whether it's work or...a whole college year [a playful rib at me], or an enemy invasion! <<Laughs>>

It's a lot like magic is. The black magic mythological stuff is—the performance magic is...a lot of times a slight of hand which occupies someone's awareness with a certain move, while you do something...with the other hand, or something while they're not watching. Now...what a nasty section of roads does it...occupies your consciousness to the point where your brain's just chugging away at a problem—where you know if you screw-up on that problem, you're gonna take out a **body panel**\* or **high center**\* your axle and humiliate yourself. Then it's Zen and the art of thrashing your rig! <<We break down into laughter.>> And that's the point. You know everybody's looking for something different, but I think on a fundamental level it goes back down to...having your consciousness pulled away from your usual routine for enough that...your psyche, or whatever, has a chance to take a deep, deep breath, while, of course, your consciousness is dealing with what's at hand! (David Jarvis, 5/1993)

An advert for *Superlift Suspensions Systems* company recently used a slogan playing with the notion that the back country is an escape from the urban existence: "Sometimes There's Mountains To Climb...instead of corporate ladders" (76). The advert plays with the oppositional relationship believed to exist between the outback and the work-a-day world. For instance, during a Summer, 1994, *Lone Peak 4-*

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson notes that "it is only since the Industrial Revolution, with its unbalanced concentration of production, power, and wealth in the cities, that it has been possible to think of the country as...a place of retreat...That is now happening again, as urban dominance of the economy is waning and the social and ecological crisis in the city intensifies" (203).



*Wheeler's* trail ride, I overheard participants discuss how nice it is to get away from a world where they are always in such a hurry--where even the microwave takes too long.

According to these individuals, this hectic life is all part of a process that keeps taking more and more freedom away. When discussing the positive qualities of the outback, Quinn Mortensen balances these comments by noting the "crowded" and the restrictive nature of urban life:

I like...being on my own a lot. And, that's one thing 4-wheeling is--getting to an area where people might not have been for a year or more. I like being in an area, getting out, and being in nature. It's more of an escapist attitude, trying to get away from society and its restrictions, the judgements of others...No matter how much we like to think--to tell ourselves--we're not influenced by others' decisions...pretty much everyone is influenced by...how others perceive them. You get alone in the mountains and basically you can be yourself. You don't have to impress nature with anything.  
(5/11/1993)

Essentially, this view of the back country world is diametrically opposite to Rock Crawlers' view of the urban situation, which can be described as:

Men having grown "mechanical in head and heart"...mean[ing] that their behavior is increasingly determined externally, which is to say, by invisible, abstract, social forces unrelated (or alien) to their inward impulses. Hegel...called this state "self estrangement," thereby implying a conflict between the "social" and the "natural" self. (Marx, 1964, 176-77)

Statements regarding the back country's positive qualities from David Jarvis, Quinn Mortensen, and others, seem to agree with the idea that the urban world can be equated with "external control." This control is obviously not seen as a positive force.

Motivated by this belief, parents come to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*

*Inc.*, a store specializing in selling and installing equipment for modifying 4x4 vehicles. Time and again I have heard the same justifications for their interest in vehicle modification: the city's negative influence was something from which they wanted to take their family away. Many couples believed that by modifying the family vehicle they could heighten their ability to escape into nature, where their family would enjoy the independence it provided. Allan Olsen enjoys taking his family rock crawling for these reasons:

You know, it keeps the family together, keeps us doing something we all enjoy, and gives us time together on the weekends when we're not working...[We] take the family, go up, and not necessarily hard core 4-wheeling. It's just--go to the mountains to get away, to get away from the people. In Summer, when it's hot, it's cool in the mountains. It's someplace to go, something to do. (4/12/1996)

This ideal is not exclusive to the area where the store and Allan are located.

Exhibiting similar values, a magazine editorial—written in California—urged:

Getting into the back country seems to set your priorities straight and is loads of fun... Parents, I encourage you to introduce your teenagers to our hobby. Maybe go in with them and buy an old beater to fix up. Working together will bring you closer to each other and strengthen family ties. After the 4x4 gets running, your sons and daughters will have a way to get into the back country and explore our heritage, becoming self-sufficient besides. It worked for me. (Howell, 1995, 7)

This editorial not only links the outback with freedom, but with "our heritage."<sup>23</sup> The perception that back country spaces are lands of freedom and beauty, left by "our forefathers" is routinely conflated with notions of escape, solitude, and self sufficiency for drivers and their families.

Another writer blends images of back country freedom with his own family

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<sup>23</sup> Bale has discussed sportscapes as heritage locations (137-39).

history.<sup>24</sup> For him the two themes are inextricably linked:

Like many of you, I was introduced to four-wheel driving before I could walk. The remote places we explored in my dad's Renegade CJ-5 created the feeling of living in another time for my brother and me. I can still remember the sun beating down on us, cold creeks and the smell of pine. The ghostly "whining" of the Jeep in 4-low. Tires gripping and slipping.....It was a legacy, a way of life, begun by my grandfather who initiated my Dad in an old Willy's overland truck. (Farnes, 82-3)

Farnes continues by discussing the morphology of his vehicle and how he has raised his own children--now grown and with Jeeps of their own--with constant trips into the back country; he concludes by touching on the fear that this "legacy" will be lost because of militant actions by people who he, like other Rock Crawlers, broadly defines as "environmentalists:"

Environmentalists are not out to steal our memories, they could never do that, but what about those who will drive the roads after us? Is it a sport that we are defending, or a way of life? My love for the mountains began in a Jeep, and hopefully it can for others, too. (83)

The editorial staff's answer to Farnes' commentary is equally revealing:

Yes, four-wheeling is a legacy to be passed on to future generations as well as to friends and family now. You are doing everyone a great service by doing your part to pass the torch. With a little work on everyone's part, the wide-open spaces will be there for your great-grandchildren. (83)

Rock Crawlers transform uninhabited spaces into "wide-open" and liberating back country places; they voyage into these zones for the boon they provide--emotional and physical escape. This is the "legacy," and they expect and plan for its existence

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<sup>24</sup> It is also interesting to note what a sensual experience the back country trips are for him. He describes his experiences using input from nearly all of his senses. Although sitting in a car might seem to prohibit such enjoyment, it does not. This will be discussed at length later.

in the lives of their children.

Mr. Farnes' description of the back country is important to note. This is no excursion comprised of blasting wantonly off-road. For him, such trips are sensual episodes. He describes his experiences using input from three of his five senses: smell, sound, feel. He even notes the (mental) sensation of time displacement, which reinforces the concept of the outback as an Other place. Although sitting in a 4x4 might seem to prohibit such enjoyment, it does not for this individual.

The back country is seen by Rock Crawlers as unspoiled; it must be to remain an escape from the urban world. If these special places become defiled, they are less pure and cease to offer the escape that they once proffered. The Otherness of these places is what makes them appealing:

You can go out through nature, you can be one with nature. You can see some sights that you wouldn't otherwise see...You're just up there—you're saying, "this trail goes someplace, I want to see the sights. I want to *be* up in the fresh air and stuff." I think part of 4-wheeling is you drive to reach the end of the trail and you say: "O.K. we've come to the end, let's get out and enjoy it." You don't get to the end, sit there in your rig and say: "Well gee, made it to the end, let's go find a different trail," and just do 4-wheeling. To me, that's not what 4-wheeling is about—it's *getting* to some place, *being* some place. If you're just going to go out and 4-wheel, then you can just get a loop and keep doing that loop *over* and *over*. Because, as long as you're moving you'd be happy...If it takes you some place that is nice to be, then the trail is worth while. (Quinn Mortensen, 5/11/1993)<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Quinn's affinity for 4-wheeling arises from its ability to take him to a "place." Rock crawling provides the opportunity to get him into a landscape he normally does not see. An integral part of Quinn's off-roading experience is getting

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<sup>25</sup> Quinn reiterated this opinion during a later conversation when he noted that "off-roading isn't just about 4-wheeling, it about being someplace" (7/4/1997).

out of his rig to explore these places, places that if he didn't have his 4x4 he might have to hike days to get to. Rock crawling, then, is more than driving, it is a chance to be in, and to access, the outback.

Ber Knight, information officer for the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* in Moab, Utah, stated that the original organization of the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari* was to access the land as a group, and to "share...the treasures of Spring in our country and so on and so forth" (5/12/1995). He explains:

Well, I think we have the country for [the safari]...It isn't the most difficult trails anywhere. Because there are more difficult trails, I would say. [He laughs] You want somethin' hard--you dig a hole in the ground and pour water in it! You don't have to be out in the country. But we do have great country, and it's just kind of gotten to be a thing to do. (5/12/1995)

Both Quinn and Ber also believe that difficulty is an important factor for rating trails. But each makes it clear that arduous driving conditions are not the sole reason for their wilderness retreats. Enjoying nature's beauty is equally important. Quinn notes that if driving was the single motivation, a circular trail could be constructed; Ber asserts that a pit filled with water would suit an individual looking solely for a thrilling ride. Both images hinge on a lack of mobility and a lack of interest in one's surroundings: the circle endlessly goes no place and the pit sucks one in. Thus, "motion provides [trail ride participants] with a direct experience of space, a sense of...freedom" (Bale, 142). This is important because freedom of movement is linked with an appreciation of nature's "untrammelled" beauty as the relief from the urban existence (Wilson, 205).

"Aesthetic appreciation of [the outback]" (Tuan, 1971, 34) hinges upon the

belief that the land one travels upon exists in opposition to that in which Rock Crawlers regularly exist. To sustain this image, back country places are viewed as places "where people might not have been for a year or more" (Quinn Mortensen, 5/11/1993). This is extremely important. During visits to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, Rock Crawlers routinely profess that a given back country area seemed: "untouched by others," "unseen by society," "so remote we didn't see anyone the whole time we were there." They describe these locations as "pristine," or "so difficult to get to that I'll bet no human has seen this place for years." During club meetings for the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*, similar statements were often made. In fact, nearly any time Rock Crawlers discuss the quality of a given trail, its seemingly untrammelled qualities will be mentioned.

These assertions represent the need to view the land as unspoiled. The more "untouched" a tract of land appears, the greater its appeal.<sup>26</sup> This is because the more remote an outback area seems, the more (psychologically and physically) distanced it appears from society. This ideal has often been expressed by trail ride participants who uttered phrases like: "Boy do I feel sorry for 'X' stuck back in the city." This and other comments similar to it were made on a *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* trail ride during the Summer of 1994. They referred to a club member who could not attend the event due to business obligations. These statements draw a comparison

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<sup>26</sup> A solitary appearance is the important criterium. As will be discussed, an irony exists in that physical remoteness is not always a necessity. Often the illusion of remoteness or escape is of primary importance. Although this seems contradictory, it must be remembered that taking one's mind away from the "daily grind" is the ultimate goal. Physical distance is not always wholly required—but does certainly add to the experience. See chapter five.

between the participants' joy while in nature and the imagined anxiety of those individuals still within the urban sprawl.

Despite the notion that the outback has rarely seen human intervention, individuals realize that their very presence there makes it a little less wild, a little more tame. This is the point at which a contradiction within the outback worldview reveals itself.

### THE OUTBACK AS A PLACE OF PARADOX

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Wallace Stevens 1919, 1923

It was not until I became a serious Rock Crawler that the relevance of Wallace Stevens' poem "Anecdote of the Jar" struck me. Until then, the idea that a jar could tame a vast wilderness—or even a small hill—seemed a poetic stretch at best. Yet, I have not been alone in realizing the keen insight revealed by Stevens' poetry. I have witnessed the angst created within drivers by trash-strewn trails; even an aluminum can secreted in the bushes near a camp site can arouse consternation. It has been noted that "there are few things as repulsively unecological as a bunch

of empty beer bottles and cans littering an otherwise beautiful campsite" (DeLong, 1996, 32). I too respond this way.

The following letter to the editor of a popular 4x4 magazine clearly demonstrates this outrage. Notice the realization that the land is, and continues to be, used as a public thoroughway:

The trash at Ellis Creek was terrible. We picked up paper, plastic and over 30 cans that were littering the place. The trashed camp site had a wonderful view of one painted boulder. I can assure you that when environmentalists hike along the Rubicon [trail], it won't be large vehicles that bother them. The ignorance of a few individuals who don't pick up after themselves and paint graffiti on the boulders will. (Zeigler, 11)

The letter is emphatic in its articulation of the anger experienced by Rock Crawlers when encountering any form of trash or destructive activities along trails. Such violent reactions symbolize more than a mere hatred for trash. They reveal an underlying realization that the outback is not truly a "virginal" territory, it is shared with other individuals who regularly utilize it for *their own* needs.<sup>27</sup>

As is evident, serious Rock Crawlers are not content to let offenses to the outback's "pristine" quality rest. For them pristine means no trash along the trail, no destruction of trailside foliage, and no "blazing" new trails across the countryside. By cleaning the trash—which is inevitably blamed on other recreationalists: mountain bikers, motorcyclists, or campers—the illusion of an undefiled wilderness is maintained. In further efforts to maintain these areas, organized clubs throughout the West (and the entire U.S.) sponsor periodic clean-ups along trails or scenic

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<sup>27</sup> It also alludes to the battle for land usage existing between off-roaders and many other groups; this will be discussed later.



nighways in their area.

More than 200 volunteers—spent the day at Sycamore Creek...for a day of cleaning...Obstacles like burnt-out cars, various broken-down appliances, and even two kitchen sinks were hauled out. In the end, the people enjoyed themselves so much, they wanted to know when and where the next clean up would be. That's the kind of volunteer enthusiasm we usually see from off-highway enthusiasts. (*Four Wheeler Staff*, 18)

These volunteers also rebuild trails that need work:

The *Mona Pole Canyon* [was] slated for closure and just nobody took an interest in it. And our club [*Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*] found out about it—found out there had been a—a snow slide, and the road was closed because of the slide. And so we had a work project one Saturday, and had about 30 rigs and about six or eight chainsaws. And we re-opened the road. And it's still open. (Ed Isaacson, 4/16/1996)

Trail re-building occurs regularly, often in conjunction with local wilderness or forest service agencies.

The willingness to blame others for trailside trash is common. "Four wheelers...do a lot of trail maintenance, to protect...trails from washouts and other hazards. They also perform a lot of litter removal, and over the years have hauled out tons of trash and debris left by hikers and campers" (Farquhar, Holder & Wescott, 26-30). A rumor-panic that blazed through the 1994 *Jeep Safan* revealed Rock Crawlers' habit of blaming others for outback trash. It alleged that the event might be cancelled in future years due to the destructive activities of outside groups ruining the landscape. Stories further claimed that the government—and even the town council of Moab—had had enough destruction of the landscape. The safari and the local trails would be closed during Easter week in the future.

Many individuals expressed consternation towards mountain bikers, hikers,

and the partying spring break college students who have thronged to Moab in recent years. It was believed that these groups had perpetrated the destruction responsible for the trail closures. Safari participants saw themselves as defenders of the undefiled quality of the outback--against outsiders perceived as not caring.

A "keep it pristine" ideal is taken to serious levels to protect the Rock Crawling belief system and the environment. At *The Easter Jeep Safari* littering is not the only frowned-upon activity; porta-potties are taken along with each official trail ride so individuals may fulfill the tenet: "pack out what you pack in!"<sup>28</sup>

But trash is only one of several challenges to the outback's existence. A greater challenge exists within the very existence of the trails themselves. A trail's survival heralds man's past--and continuing--forays into the back country. For Rock Crawlers, this quandary poses a threat that is never fully articulated, but is certainly felt. This threat can be broken down into two component parts: (1) the existence of the trail represents a threat to the perceived "unspoiled" nature of the back country; and (2) driving along the trail poses the potential threat of continuing the degradation to these spaces. These problems not only create angst within the group, they spur action. This is because "when our meaningful places are threatened, we feel threatened as well" (Ryden, 40). Although this action does not always take the form of articulating the paradoxical nature of the existence of trails (and their travellers) within the back country, it certainly does give rise to self-justifying thought processes.

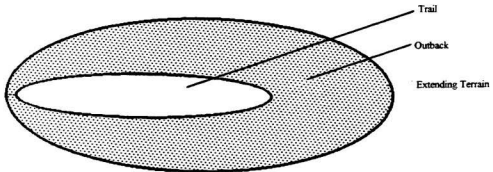
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<sup>28</sup> For more concerning back country behavior tenets, see chapter five.

## UNSPOILED OUTBACK AND THE EXISTENCE OF TRAILS

An obvious paradox exists. How can land seem "untouched by humanity" or "rarely seen" and have a trail running through it at the same time? This issue, and how Rock Crawlers deal with it, is a riddle that plagued me incessantly; after all, I am not only researching this community, I am also a member. I recognized an answer to this conundrum within a dichotomy built into narratives concerning back country trips. This dichotomy enables drivers to pigeon-hole the topography into two loosely defined zones that do not seem to infringe upon each other (fig: 2.13).

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**FIG: 2.13** Landscape pigeon holes.

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The first zone is the trail and the land easily accessible to it. When speaking about a given trail the common tendency is to assert that it looks as if it is a "very remote place" likely to have had few folks traversing it recently (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996). Obviously such assertions could serve as boasts of prowess (ie: only *my*

vehicle can gain access to this location); yet more is at stake here than personal driving reputations. By professing that a trail is remote or rarely travelled, drivers declare that it has generally avoided regular intrusion by the masses. The less travelled a trail seems to be, the more removed from the urban world it seems.

An assumption tacitly exists that the trail takes one into the outback, but somehow remains a separate entity from its surrounding topography. This is how the outback can be described as pristine land, yet have a trail running through its midst. Through this spatial separation, the trail and outback topography immediate to it are divided from the surrounding landscape. The trail is, indeed, seen as part of the back country—but only if it is perceived as having limited contact with 4x4s and people. A trail that is frequently or regularly travelled is not always seen as part of the outback. The *Poison Spider Mesa* trail illustrates this point (fig: 2.3).

*Poison Spider* trail begins as a diversion from a paved road northwest of Moab. The trail's first two miles are merely dirt road, also accessible by 2-wheel drive vehicles; consequently it is largely travelled and camped. The easily accessible nature of this section of the trail causes drivers to comment that "we aren't even on the trail yet" (Quinn Mortensen, 8/30/1997). Afterwards the trail suddenly becomes increasingly difficult, restricting access primarily to modified 4-wheel drive rigs. Although the trail originates two miles back, the point where it becomes difficult is often referred to as the trail-head, or "where the trail begins" (Quinn Mortensen, 7/7/1997). The restricted access to the rest of the trail renders it more valuable, more likely to be back country.

In narratives, lands extending out and away from trails have been referred to

in ways that highlight their untrammelled nature, such as: "unseen by any human," "never before walked upon," or even "God's own country" (comments during a 1993 *Jeep Safari* trail ride). These assertions reflect the second level or pigeon hole into which the physical environment is placed. Topographies, that can be explored, looked at (beautiful vistas), or hiked upon, are described in ways that reveal the basic tendency for Rock Crawlers to see them as undefiled. Despite the fact that a location may be within a half-hour's walk of a trail, individuals are likely to see the spot they have found as their own special place, a tract of land known only to them. These places can be shared with close friends or kept as closely guarded secrets--much like a fisherman's secret fishing hole.

My group of friends has a special camping location off a trail in *American Fork Canyon*, just north of American Fork, Utah (F map 1). We travel to this same spot year in and year out. One weekend during the Summer of 1994 we went camping and found another group in our spot. Quinn guided our group to find a new location further up the trail; but the weekend did not seem right. We lamented the absence of the waterfall that we usually enjoyed. Others who joined the group later also expressed anxiety at not having "our spot." Some joked about going down and kicking the "interloping" campers off of a location that was *clearly* not theirs.

Ed Isaacson once stated that a group of drivers who had wrongly left a trail went "out through the boonies" (4/16/1996). Although the rigs went no further than a hundred yards, they had left the trail and entered his perception of this second zone. Trash or tire tracks found in such locations are a supreme affront and are not

likely to be forgotten. This is because they damage areas that should not be used, and their presence reveals the regular usage of, and intrusion into, spaces perceived as being escapes from the urban world.

These perceptions concerning the Otherness of the land are not unlike those presented in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.<sup>29</sup> Purported to have been written in Sumeria three hundred years prior to the birth of Christ, the epic details the struggles of Gilgamesh, the ruler of a wealthy and powerful city. Despite his power and the amenities it brought, he was not satisfied. Realizing that his anxiety was born of the urban milieu itself, he ventured into the bush. There he met Enkidu, who was the embodiment of that alternate zone. Living off the land and running with animals, his pleasures were derived from "more simple" means. Enkidu symbolized everything that was antithetical to the city. Through his associations with Enkidu, Gilgamesh was able to escape the aspects of urban life which he did not like. He also attained a new harmony within his own psyche.

The outback acts as an Enkidu for Rock Crawlers. Whether driving on a trail or hiking away from one, the solitude and sights of the outback are believed to be a rejuvenating force against the bureaucratic nature of urban life. Yet the paradoxical nature of the outback existence rears its head again.

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<sup>29</sup> For a more in-depth discussion concerning the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and its relation to views of the land, see Yi-Fu Tuan's *Man and Nature* (34).

**PHYSICAL PROBLEMS WITH 4X4s IN THE OUTBACK**

By this point, readers are probably asking themselves: "But what about the 4x4s, are Rock Crawlers not taking their machines into the back country to escape the urban world? Is this not like taking the proverbial monkey on your back?" Herein lies the ultimate irony; machines are prized as the means for slipping free from the urban sphere. And their presence takes the urban world one step closer to the outback one.

An answer to this quandary began to unfold while I talked to Randy Robinson, a long-time Rock Crawler and vehicle modification guru. On June 6, 1997, I was visiting his shop, *Advanced Four-Wheel Drive Systems*, and the two of us had become involved in a discussion concerning land use. For Rock Crawlers, the term "land use" is employed when referring to problems--usually socio-political--associated with accessing the outback. Randy lead the conversation and it was easy to see that the topic had struck a chord because he was forceful, adamant, in his assertions. The calm facade that I was used to seeing in him vanished and he became visually agitated as he spoke of the differing groups "all attempting to hedge-off the land for their own agendas."

Validating the Rock Crawler's use of the outback, Randy then slipped into a traditionally used description of 4x4 utilization:

The distances in the desert are so great. Some of the places you get to see are so remote that you simply *could not* see them if you were on foot or on a horse. You *couldn't* carry enough water. There is *no* way to see these places without a vehicle. So if vehicles are forbidden

from these places they simply *will not* be experienced by people.  
(6/19/1997)

Randy's assertion that rigs are crucial for accessing outback places is the crux of many Rock Crawlers' justification for taking their machine(s) into these spaces. Like Randy, many "enjoy...4-wheeling more to get to a point rather than the actual 4-wheeling of it. I mean, I do enjoy the 4-wheeling, but I like getting to someplace that's remote--where you don't get a lot of people--and then getting out and hiking, looking around and stuff" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1997).

The idea of using one's rig to access the outback is pivotal. This point is ubiquitous to conversations regarding "land use," and even what types of trails drivers enjoy. Discourse among Rock Crawlers regularly focuses on the places their rigs have helped them to access:

I like to go up to old mines and ghost towns...It's better if it's really good 4-wheeling--you know--challenging--obstacles, places...people don't frequent often. I guess--you know--it makes it that much more interesting because not very many people go out there. (Shannon Shirk, 4/21/1997)

The vehicles are a means for taking people to places away from the urban sphere. Yet as is noted above, they are also a means for finding challenging diversions.

Outback places are accessed for their diversionary benefits. They draw trail ride participants out of their ordinary world. Many focus on the visual aspects of these places. However, the aesthetics of diversion are not limited to panoramic vistas. Shannon Shirk once noted that his favorite trail is the *Jackhammer*. Running through a dry, boulder-strewn, desert wash, this trail is not noted for its pleasurable vistas. When asked why he preferred this trail, Shannon's explanation was rife with



images of outback places as challenges:

Well, its just one obstacle after another, no space in between. It's unforgiving. It's just—you know—it's only eight-tenths of a mile long. And it takes you eight hours to go over it. I'm serious! It's just killer. And then you get to the end and you think you are done, and then you—The cool thing about *Jackhammer* is you get up to it and you're like, "Where's the trail?" Because it's just a rock mountain, basically. And if you look real close, you can see the tire marks where you're supposed to go. That's it. And then you get done, and you're up this really hard, super loose—it's a loose, rocky, climb. But the rocks are as big as your tires—basically. You get over that and you think you are done; and then you're trying to look for the way out. Then you see that you have to go up kind of a loose, rocky fin". You have to go straight up it. There's a really **off-camber**\* thing...at the top. It scares the crap out of you. I hate that, man. If it wasn't for that *Jackhammer* would be just fine. (4/21/1996)

Like Shannon, Chris Stephens enjoys difficult aspects of trails because of "the challenge...because it...challenges the machine that I've built and then challenges me" (7/21/1994).

Charlie Copsey, too, is always on the look-out for a trail that boasts heart-stopping challenges. During a conversation in his shop, *Just 4 Fun Motorsports*, Charlie told me about his first trip through the *Surprise Canyon* trail, in California (7/21/1994). He noted that upon its completion, his modified Chevy pick-up was nearly destroyed. It had sustained heavy body damage, and the front suspension had nearly been ripped from the frame. Despite the damage to his rig, he loved the trip. Arriving home, he immediately began to build up "a rig that could do any trail I wanted it to do."

4x4s, then, are seen as *vehicles* (in both senses of the word) for accessing and enjoying the back country. As such, they are essential to the outback

experience. Regardless if one is like Quinn and Randy, who use their rigs to access specific locations for other activities, or whether a driver tends to be like Charlie, Chris, and Shannon, who enjoy the outback primarily for the thrill associated with traversing its extreme terrain. Either extreme depends upon the 4x4 to gain access to these diversionary locations.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, trail ride participants routinely engage in other trail ride activities that put them in touch with outback places. They are constantly in and out of their vehicles; they jump out to look at this vista, or play in that stream, or to hike an interesting foot-path. They enjoy the outdoor smells from within and without their rigs.<sup>31</sup> In addition to these ventures, they routinely stop their rigs and get out to watch or spot others as they drive. While on a six hour trail ride, at least three hours are spent interacting with (and on) the landscape.

During a break on the *Salt Creek Canyon* trail (F map 1), several children spotted, and eventually caught, a lizard (6/22/1996). Adults took the opportunity to teach them about the animal's physiology, eating habits, and environment. People crowded around as the children reached out to touch and pet the animal. The children set the lizard free before the group journeyed on.

The idea of taking machines into the outback to enjoy nature's bounties may seem incongruous. Rather than articulating this issue, Rock Crawlers adopt an

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<sup>30</sup> It is common to hear comments about the qualities of a trail that focus on that trail's difficulty *and* visual beauty: "The scenery is fantastic and there is plenty of potential for new and interesting obstacles everywhere" (Howell, 1997a, 52-8).

<sup>31</sup> For more concerning the "smellscapes of sports," see: Bale, 142.

elaborate set of rationalizations and behavior-modifying belief systems. These measures ensure that utilizing vehicles does not negate or damage the land and the experiences it proffers. Such systems also ensure that operating machines in the outback is never directly addressed as a threat to these places by the community.

The largest movement in this process to date is *Tread Lightly!*. It originated as an organization centered upon propagating the idea of driving vehicles (including: horses, mountain bikes, motorcycles etc.) in ways that least impact the environment. It, then, was a reaction against preservationist groups alleging that recreational land users were ruining America's "wilderness areas" and "wild lands" (*Southern Utah Wilderness Association*, <http://www.suwa.org/faqpart4.html#roads>). "*Tread Lightly!* is more of, I believe, a guideline to keep...the areas we go to as--you know--pristine as possible. To keep it so that long term use won't change it" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996).

The precepts urged by the *Tread Lightly!* operation have been heartily embraced by most serious off-roaders. These rules not only help keep the land as unaffected by 4x4 use as possible, but the actions it advises also help to maintain the illusion of an undefiled back country. For, when trails are scarred with holes created by truck tires, mud pits made by drivers careening through wet trails, or foliage ruined by vehicles taken off trails, the dream of escaping from the normal world into an Other one does not ring true.

*Tread Lightly!* was organized as a means for changing individuals' thought processes regarding back country locations. Its tenets not only advocate certain

driving adjustments to protect the beauty of the land, it also encourages drivers to consider the equipment they take into the wilderness—even down to the type of clothing they wear. An Ogden, Utah, branch of the *U.S. Forest Service* initiated the national movement in 1985. “They called this program *Tread Lightly!*, exclamation point included in the name! Like, “You better *Tread Lightly!* or pretty soon you Can’t *Tread At All!*” (DeLong, 1996, 29).

The organization maintains a web site on the internet. A brief history included at this site notes:

It was concluded that a long term informative program was needed to increase public awareness, that special care of the land must be exercised by recreationalists if [recreational activities] are to continue. Accordingly the *Tread Lightly!* program was developed. It’s based on the same premise as ‘Smokey Bear’ and ‘Woodsy Owl’ programs where Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl focus on fire and litter respectively, *Tread Lightly!* emphasizes low impact principles, applicable to all forms of recreational activities.  
(<http://www.4x4u.com/pub/k2/treadlightly!/>)

The crusade quickly gained support among all forms of land users, motorized and non-motorized alike. It grew rapidly, leaving the protective wing of the *Forest Service* in 1990, becoming (with sponsorship from approximately 50 corporations) a non-profit corporation that preaches the responsible use of America’s public and private lands. The corporation does all this to preserve these places and the sports occurring on them (<http://www.4x4u.com/pub/k2/treadlightly!/>). Currently, many off-roaders use the catch phrase “tread lightly” without realizing the tenets they profess are the result of an organized corporate venture. They only know that such beliefs

mandate certain obligations and actions while enjoying outback lands.<sup>32</sup>

Writer/off-roader Jack Raudy notes that, at the user level, *Tread Lightly!*

teaches visitors how to reduce evidence of their presence on public lands in all stages of a trip, from planning through breaking camp. It encompasses travel methods, clothing, equipment, camping practices, fires, and sanitation. (21)

Furthering his discussion of ecological off-roading, he quotes Jim Baca, director of the federal *Bureau of Land Management* (BLM) as commenting: "Visitors [to the outback] who take a little time to learn and practice 'Leave No Trace' techniques will go a long way toward ensuring that our unique natural treasures remain in good condition" (21).<sup>33</sup>

Such practices have become so pervasive among most Rock Crawlers that "treading lightly" is used as a catch phrase indicating all the habits one should utilize while driving in order to least impact the land. This "eco-friendly" approach to driving is seen as part of the current move for people to be more conscious of their environment. "You know—do things as you would like them done *for you*. And I try to do that" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). Most attempt to "follow ecological 4-wheeling principles when leaving the pavement. It is, after all, the responsible thing to do" (DeLong, 1996, 31). For Rock Crawlers, considering the health of the land

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<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that *Tread Lightly!* has just begun operations in Australia. This is the only country outside of USA/Canada to embrace this movement. Could the frontier mentality which exists in Australia, and parallels that of the American West, be a motivation for this? Although I have not tested this hypothesis, I suspect that it is valid.

<sup>33</sup> Actually *Leave No Trace* is a different program which teaches the same outback behavior patterns as *Tread Lightly!*

is a way to place the environment before themselves.

The crux of the *Tread Lightly!* movement hinges upon driving techniques. To drive in an appropriate manner, individuals must strictly avoid driving off the trail. But it is more than this: "I view it as not only staying on a designated trail, but avoiding damaging the existing trail" (Quinn Mortensen 4/21/1997). This entails avoiding muddy and rutted sections of trail or land, blasting over the terrain or through rivers, using excessive energy creating tire spin that results in damage to the topography, or harming the flora and fauna in any way.<sup>34</sup> An excellent example of the kind of driving advice regularly given to neophytes is that:

There are times when going the slowest possible pace is absolutely the best way to [drive off-road], such as when crawling through rock or any other kind of really rugged terrain...The right way to tackle heavy rocks is slowly, down in four-wheel drive and low range with the engine at idle or barely above. It takes experience and careful judgement to decide how large a rock you can straddle without scraping a differential or skidplate. (Crow & Murray, 114-120)

Going slow and avoiding spinning one's tires while off-road are more than mere words of wisdom, they become measuring standards by which drivers are evaluated. Drivers routinely state that slowness is a virtue. Yet although most embrace this knowledge eagerly, others are less successful (Basso, 1996, 73). Thus, there are some that do not drive in *Tread Lightly!* approved ways. Such "bad apples" are referred to as "red necks," "ya-hoos" and even "ass holes" (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996). These drivers—although a minority—cause pain to the group. This generates comments concerning driving habits:

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion on this topic see chapter five.

To some, it may sound very boring to travel a trail at a sedate pace. True, there may be a distinct lack of machoism experienced, compared to blasting across it, but there can be other, far bigger rewards to going slow. Many trails and obstacles are much harder to go across slowly than at speed. You'd prove far more driver and vehicle ability by idling up a steep hill without stirring up dust or leaving any tracks than by going fast. Hitting it fast and hard mainly reinforces faith in laws of physics; even a Greyhound bus can make it up most hills, given enough speed, and reaching the top proves only that momentum works where the vehicle wouldn't...Try driving your next trail without ever spinning a tire. It will be a demonstration of your skill, judgement, and engineering if you can do it. (Nylund, 106-8)

Such tenets are taken seriously and breaches of these rules not only generate anger towards the offending individual(s) but can result in their expulsion from a trail ride or a club.

That these ideals have become so ingrained within the driving ethic that they have become points of pride and competition. For instance, the supreme means for showing off one's vehicle modifications and driving skill is to manoeuvre as slowly as possible through tough trail obstacles. The less speed, momentum, and tire spin one uses the better. On challenges like the *Launching Pad*, *Frenchie's Fin*, and *Potato Salad Hill* in Moab, I have witnessed vehicles climbing these extremely steep hills so slowly that observers, on foot, scamper up the hill past them. Such displays elicit oohs and aahs of delight from the spectators gathered to watch as the rigs attempt these difficulties. Performances like these are sure to engender respect for the ability of the drivers and the engineering of their vehicles.

Once again, it is not overtly articulated that a paradox exists within the most basic aspect of the Rock Crawling belief canon surrounding back country usage; yet behavior modifying trends such as *Tread Lightly!*—and the actions this movement

fosters—are telling signs. They reveal an underlying realization that the intrusion of 4x4's into the outback represents a possible threat to the existence of these places. The comprehension of this threat is powerful enough that some individuals do not even purchase vehicles built by companies that advertise their products driving off-road in non-*Tread Lightly!* mandated modes.

Many non-'wheelers' perceptions of what four wheeling is come from TV commercials—possibly the single worst offender, image-wise, we have, and, ironically, paid for by the people who make four-wheel drive vehicles. Fortunately, there are mechanisms in place—largely through *Tread Lightly!*—that are now beginning to bring these misguided marketing techniques under control. (Nylund, 102)

### **THE IRONY OF 4X4s IN THE OUTBACK**

Dealing with the physical effects of vehicles upon the landscape is only half of the problem involved with taking machines into the back country. One must ask how the community uses their rigs in the back country without seeing such practices as extreme irony. In other words, why do Rock Crawlers fail to see the apparently obvious clash of using a machine to enjoy a natural environment? Not only do Rock Crawlers endure the existence of their vehicles in the outback, they elevate the usage and modification of these rigs to nearly religious status. Indeed, for many, the creation and testing of their 4x4 is an obsession that can become an end unto itself. How does the community deal with this iconoclast?

The quest for new and better technology leads Rock Crawlers into building cycles that are never completed as long as they own a vehicle. Some rigs appearing



on trails like *the Rubicon*, in the Sierra-Nevada Mountains (F map 1), are the incredible result of over thirty years of building and rebuilding. The old timers operating and building these rigs—like the younger drivers—constantly seek new products to heighten trail performance. In this quest, the machines become thoroughly reconfigured. Light weight and rust-impervious fiberglass body parts may take the place of the original steel ones. New axles may supplant the less **bullet proof**\* ones that came from the factory. Traction aiding devices, called **lockers**\* by most off-roaders, are installed in **axle differentials**\* to ensure that maximum traction can be obtained while in “the wilds.” In the quest for performance, **locking differentials**\* have been created that are even activated via compressed air; other new models are manipulated electronically. The utilization of technology does not end there. Special welding equipment is installed under the hoods of many 4x4s so that broken parts may be welded while on the trail! This alleviates the need for long (and often impossible) hikes back into town for parts.

Many rigs are now built using aircraft parts and equipment (Chip Brox, 4/7/1996; Mark Milner, 1/22/1998). A recent rage has been the addition of portable **GPS**\* locating units to the rigs. These units, originally invented for aircraft, are utilized to locate one’s position (to within fifty feet) while deep within the outback. These units—obtaining their information from orbiting satellites—provide reliable information anywhere on earth. Such technology has proven invaluable to explorers

venturing deep into the American and Mexican deserts.<sup>35</sup> Chip Brox commented on the super-technology that is currently finding its way to the rigs:

A lot of people break a lot of things. So when you go out and break something, you don't just put it back together like it was. You try to *modify* it--if you will--to the point where the next time that you're on that obstacle, then that part won't break. The weakest link is the problem that you have every time that you go out on a Jeep ride; and a lot of people are doing modifications to their Jeep that are aircraft-spec oriented now. You see lots of things from the aircraft industry--as far as being tough. I mean, who would have ever thought that you could see a Jeep with **tie-rod ends**\* on it that were manufactured in an *airplane plant*!? You know, who would have ever thought of these new **transfer cases**\* that are so low-geared...those things are *amazing*! (4/7/1996)

Utilizing technology goes farther than 4x4 construction; recently several Rock Crawlers' internet sites were brought on-line.<sup>36</sup> This technological wonder gives computer owners information on everything from vehicle modification to driving tips for trails world-wide; these sites even offer club membership and trail ride registration forms. Literally hundreds of scanned pictures detail: people's vehicles, how to accomplish modifications, parts for sale, trail rides, and camp-outs that groups have taken in back country locations.

All of this new technology serves only to more powerfully beg the question: how can this utilization of technology square with the goal of enjoying the "natural"

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<sup>35</sup> During April of 1991, the *Bila bud Benna* club in Iceland navigated their vehicles over rugged glacier-covered topography and oceanscapes to the 7,000 foot peak of Vatnajökull Glacier, the world's largest ice mountain. Once there, each of the 10 vehicles in the group were winched and driven to the top. The trip took over one week and would have been impossible without relying extensively upon GPS units for navigating the ice flows.

<sup>36</sup> One primary site is: <[www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/)>. This web site interconnects surfers to nearly all other sites. Land use sites are also accessible from this location.

aspects of the outback? I have developed several hypotheses. Three overriding themes spring up when individuals refer to their vehicles as a means for escaping into the outback: (1) vehicle as extension of self; (2) vehicle as animal; and (3) vehicle as "half-way house." Discussion concerning these mindsets may approximate answers to this challenging question. It is, however, important to realize that none of these "possibilities" is an end-all in itself. Rather, these approaches shade into one another on individual and cultural levels that change from location to location and person to person.

#### Vehicle as Extension of Self

Rock Crawlers feel a close affinity to their rigs. Highlighting this affinity is the fact that the term *rock crawler* is utilized by the community to refer to themselves as a group (ie. We are Rock Crawlers), to refer to individuals within that group (ie. She's a Rock Crawler), or to refer to their vehicles (ie. He's built himself a great rock crawler). These emotional bonds run deeper than mere appreciation for machine as transportation. This love is born from a feeling of "oneness" that most drivers experience with their rigs when driving off-road.

I never realized the depth of this unity until a friend of mine commented on it while we prepared for a trail ride. Andy Bay had come with me to the 1993 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. Being a folklorist who was not a Rock Crawler, and knowing nothing concerning the event, he proved to be a perfect observer. He asked

questions about topics that I had glossed over entirely.

As we drove to the meeting place for the trail ride, I agitatedly remarked that the hot desert air was making my Bronco's throttle response—or acceleration—sluggish. He commented: "You know, it's really interesting that you know *every* sound, *every* ability, *every* aspect of this truck. You know *everything* about it, don't you?" At the time it seemed like such an obvious point; "Yes I do know these things about my rig, what's the big deal about that?" But the statement stuck in my mind. It was a while before it dawned on me that not all automobile owners have such a relationship with their vehicle; yet this type of connection is common for Rock Crawlers. In fact, most of my informants have alluded to, or forthrightly asserted, a type of symbiotic relationship with their truck(s).<sup>37</sup>

Chris Stephens, a well known driver, attempted to articulate this relationship, "I think you have to—you know—feel like you're part of the vehicle." He continued:

I can usually tell if I can make it up an obstacle when I pull up to it at the bottom. Like, it's just a feeling I have. If I feel like I'm part of the Jeep that day—then I can do it...I don't feel like I'm driving. I feel more like I'm walking up the obstacle. Like I look at it—and just the same thing that you do mentally to walk up it—it feels the same in my vehicle. Just like I'm out on my feet, you know, instead of actually driving something. And I think—a lot of people, when they get to that point, you know that makes them a good driver. (7/1994)<sup>38</sup> (figs: 2.14, 2.15)

The vehicle/driver unity Chris' attempts to describe is even felt by neophyte Rock Crawlers as they learn how to drive off-road. Jake Rex had been rock crawling

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<sup>37</sup> Crow and Murray's *Off-Roader's Handbook* provides an in-depth discussion concerning the specifics of knowing one's vehicle (108-9).

<sup>38</sup> One Jeep bearing the name "Trail Walker," graphically displays the same notions of driver/vehicle unity as have been discussed by Chris (Wickham, 68).



FIG: 2.14 Chris Stephens edges onto *Double Whammy*, near Moab, Utah. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)



FIG: 2.15 Chris continues to "walk up" *Double Whammy*. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)

for just over a year when he attempted to articulate the same dynamic:

I think one thing that makes a good driver is someone that can tell what his vehicle's going to do—how it's going to react to the terrain...Someone with some skill will be able to tell *exactly* where his tires are at all times, so that he knows what his vehicle is going to do and what it is he's got to get over—not just assuming and ending up being in the wrong place at the wrong time and maybe causing damage. (7/1996)

The idea of being “merge[d]” with one’s vehicle is so important that Rock Crawlers routinely tell stories focusing on the disastrous outcome of people who drive vehicles they do not “know” over tough terrain (Hufford, 1992, 43). Individuals in such tales are usually said to be greenhorns—such mistakes could *never* be perpetrated by experienced drivers.

This “dynamic fusion of...[mankind] and [machine]” may enable drivers to overlook the intrusion of vehicles into the back country because they are not seen as purely technological fact, but an extension of the driver’s psyche (27). As an extension of the driver the vehicle ceases to be machine. Because technology is utilized as an extension of the human psyche this dynamic could be seen as tending to make humans seem more mechanical, more machine-like. Yet the process is not perceived as having this effect. Instead, the rigs are thought of as more human-like.

Perceiving 4x4s as an extension of the driver produces comments which are asserted as if actions occurred to, or were carried out by, the individual instead of the vehicle. “So I went there and just *walked* right up this thing” (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). “I haven’t even made it up *Double Whammy* yet” (Chris Stephens, 7/21/1994). It is common to hear drivers make comments such as: “I broke *my*

axle," "I had to hop up a series of ledges," or "I couldn't make it up because I kept breaking traction." It is important to realize that no distinction between vehicle and self is asserted with such comments. Rather, an assumed unity is implied. Such harmony could be the reason why vehicles are not seen as an overriding threat to the back country.

### Vehicle as Animal

When one considers the historical milieu that has produced Western American culture it is logical to see the step Rock Crawlers have taken by equating their 4x4s with horses.<sup>39</sup> Horses were the instrument through which mythologized cowboys gained their freedom to roam the great expanses of Western topography. Acknowledging this relationship, it has been stated that "without horses, there could be no cowboys" (Slatta, 87). The belief that horses afforded these men their freedom from the constraints of an overbearing eastern society is still widely held, despite much evidence to the contrary.<sup>40</sup> This mobility is seen as having fostered a cult of individuality among the cowboys which is in many ways co-opted by Rock Crawlers.

Given this history, it is no wonder that many individuals refer to their vehicle

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<sup>39</sup> Equating vehicles with horses is not unique to Rock Crawlers. Carolyn S. Brown, in her study of tall tales, notes that Sergeant Bill Davidson recorded World War II GIs replacing the horses in widely known tall tales with their more contextually relevant Jeeps (6-7).

<sup>40</sup> See: Beverly Stoeltje's "Power and the Ritual Genres: American Rodeo."

as if it were a horse. At the beginning of many trail rides it is customary for trail leaders call out, "load 'em up, move 'em out" or "pack 'em up, move 'em out!" The cowboy/pioneer image is unmistakable; and the allusion to rigs as being horses that need to be packed and/or mounted is not hard to see.

4x4s are often referred to as: "workhorses," "packhorses," "4-wheeled steeds," and I have even heard "mount" used on trail rides. Mark Werkmeister, an avid Rock Crawler and writer, provides further evidence by referring to people getting out of their rigs as "everyone dismounted." He later uses the line, "if you're saddled" in reference to being in one's 4x4 (1993, 62, 65). Furthering this idea, storage bags that mount to the roll bars of Jeeps are called "saddle bags." Many drivers have pet names for their rigs which bear equestrian allusions; "Crazy Horse," "Knight-Mare," "Pack Mule," "Little Mule" and "Lil' Pony" are several that I have spotted in magazines or at trail rides over the years.

With these examples a new significance emerges from the term "tread lightly." The play on words is unmistakable: to tread, as in walking (and galloping), or in reference to the tread on one's tires. Such play hinges on the tacit understanding among Rock Crawlers—in fact, most off-roaders—that a connection is made between themselves, their 4x4s, and the regular usage of horse imagery (fig: 2.16).

The significance to this discussion of blending animal and 4x4 is that, once again, the machine has been transformed. No longer is it technological fact—a product of the urban world—it has been altered into a living entity. It is given animate qualities that negate the destructive nature inherent to its reality as a technological product. Further supporting this ideal is the fact that many drivers paint their rigs



with animal-print designs. Although fading in popularity in the late-nineties, animal prints like cow, giraffe, zebra, and tiger were commonplace in the early 90s.<sup>41</sup> One Jeep called "Old Dog" had what was purported to be dog spots. And recently I spotted a vehicle in Moab that sported a cow-bell dangling from its front axle.

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**Fig: 2.16** The Jeep's front axle has snapped, and, like a horse with a broken leg, it must be put out of its misery. This image from W.W.II plays with the conflation of horse and Jeep and has appeared on Rock Crawlers' t-shirts. (Bill Mauldin. *Up Front*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1945.)

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During a 1994 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* trail ride, our group encountered an extremely difficult trail section. Becci and I navigated our Bronco up the series of broken stone ledges and then got out and ran back to watch other drivers make their

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<sup>41</sup> For more on animal print paint schemes see chapter three.

attempts. Several rigs made it to the top with extreme difficulty. Finally, a rickety looking Jeep CJ-5 was next in line. Miraculously, the vehicle slowly, but surely, scratched its way up and over the ledges without hardly spinning a tire. As the tired looking Jeep lumbered past us, we gave the driver "thumbs-up" signals for a job well done. He smiled, leaned out of the Jeep (its top and doors were off) with his left arm and gave the side of the rig a series of gentle and reassuring pats on its "flank," just in front of the rear tire. Then he said something to the effect: "She's old, but she'll do anything!"

#### Vehicle As Half-Way House

The idea that 4x4s represent half-way houses between the city and the outback is also observable. This realization came to me while reading Leo Marx's "Pastoralism in America." Marx refers to the Gilgamesh epic and asserts that Enkidu's hut had become a "cultural half-way house" (43). He claims the hut acted as a vehicle through which man was able to commune in a "two directional" relationship with nature (43). Essentially, the edifice acted as a mediator, becoming a means for introducing and bonding the two diametrically opposed worlds—urban and back country—as represented by Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

Thoreau's small hut in Concord, Massachusetts, fulfilled the same dynamic. And like Thoreau's hut near the shores of Walden Pond, Rock Crawlers' vehicles provide a means for individuals to venture into the wilderness without wholly giving themselves up to its ravages. The naturalist's hut provided him with shelter and the

basic amenities of "civilized" life, and so does the rock crawler. From its safety, individuals can journey far "deeper into the outback than possible on foot" (Randy Robinson, 6/19/1997). 4x4s enable trail ride participants to enjoy nature far from the urban world or the crowds typical of most parks. Drivers are also provided with shelter from inclement weather.

Of course this protection can vary; like myself, many drivers own Jeeps, Broncos, Blazers, Samurais, etc, and prefer driving them off-road with the top (and/or doors) off. Topless openness makes participants feel more united with their surroundings. Yet others, like Dan Wynkoop, owner of *Mountain West Off-Road Supply Inc.*, enjoy the relaxation of their journeys from within a plush, climate-controlled, stereophonically flawless, cabin.

One of Dan's favorite moves on hot, dusty, trails has been to pull up beside drivers with open-air rigs, casually roll down the window on his Cherokee or Wrangler, and between sips from a cool Diet Coke can that rests in a dash-mounted holder, he smiles and asks: "how things are going?" (It is important to note that as he does this he makes a display of looking at the dust swirling around the person he is addressing.) It was hard for me to resist laughing at his understated rib as I stood in the midst of swirling fine-grain red dust that is common to the southern Utah desert. After the exchange, Dan spins his window back up, salutes the person he is addressing with his cola-bearing hand, and ambles down the trail in his clean, air conditioned, environment. I must admit that I have occasionally been envious.

One afternoon several drivers visiting *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*

mentioned Dan's "love of refinement while on the trail" (8/1997). While they noted that they prefer to enjoy trails from the open air, they also assented: "Sometimes it is nice to have the plush comfort that Dan *always* has on the trail." They continued, discussing the dust, wind, and changing weather that can sometimes make an open-air rig uncomfortable.

No matter what drivers consider "comfort" while driving trails, vehicles are not seen as destructive intrusions into the wilderness (unless a driver fails to tread lightly). Rather, they are felt to be a form of mid-point or mediator from which the back country can be enjoyed. When Glenn Wakefield was asked if he saw an irony in using his heavily modified Samurai—a machine—to enjoy the outback world, he answered:

I think rigs are built...to make sure you can get there...and back. "Taking the world" in my book is the people who bring their trailer and motorhomes to these wilderness areas. How can you get a feel for your surroundings if your ass is planted in front of a t.v. half the day? The best built machines have very little "technology" in them and lots of good old-fashioned simple engineering. (1/23/1997)

For Glenn, outback enjoyment is enhanced with "just enough" (just enough is subject to widely varying opinions) technology to make the trip better, but not enough to detract him from his surroundings (1/23/1997). Note that Glenn does not see his rig as technological fact. Rather, he describes it as the product of a simple—if not antiquated—bare-bones building process.

Since Rock Crawlers do not talk about the contradiction of using products from the urban world to escape its grasp, I have had to ask others the same question that I asked Glenn. Victor Mokler responded:

Yeh, that has occurred to me. I agree that it is a bit of a...paradox; but it is—I don't know—I don't know how to explain the paradox. It—ah—it's definitely there though. I don't know—I don't give it a whole lot of thought anymore. I stopped thinking about that one...It's sort-of like going skiing, but when you go skiing you end up on a man-made chair-lift anyway. So, I would say, it's much the same as that...Still, a lot of thought, and—it's a different type of driving in any case. And I think, more than anything, it's the challenge of trying to develop the skills necessary to get over whatever obstacle is in your way. (1/21/1997)

The question took Victor by surprise and he was forced to work through the irony while I listened. Interestingly, many—like Victor and Glenn—resort to the idea of only using enough technology to successfully negotiate the trails.

How much technology is “just enough” varies widely. For instance, Victor's rig is conservatively constructed, while Glenn's rig would be considered heavily modified by even the most hard-core Rock Crawlers. Glenn comments: “Technology guarantees my survival I guess. You watch a movie like *Jeremiah Johnson* and see how it is to travel the same terrain without technology. I want to be there...But I don't want to die for it” (1/23/1997). In this sense the rigs are seen as providing a means of respite from the working world, while offering comfort and safety from the harsher elements of the wilderness.

Essentially, for many drivers, it gets back to Randy Robinson's comment that vehicles are the only way that the outback can be fully accessed (6/19/1997). The vehicles utilize technology in the way that the builder believes is necessary to access the areas he or she wants to visit. “I think that the main thing that you need to try to do is get it so—first and above all—[your]...vehicle is *reliable*. You don't have to worry about problems with your vehicle” (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). Some drivers accomplish this with a “bare-bones” 4x4. Others use rigs that are fully

modified for comfort or reliability. Many contemporary vehicles even have special hot water heaters under their hoods that can turn cold stream water into a hot shower. Like a wilderness vacation cabin, vehicles become a way of escaping the urban world without giving oneself over wholly to a "primitive situation."

## CONCLUSION

For non-Rock Crawlers the outback may seem undifferentiated from the landscape in which it exists. Yet, for in-group members, these locations are important places, resounding with culturally specific meaning. The "crux in [such] matters of place is the role of perception" (Casey, 17). These different perceptions, then, are culturally acquired and transmitted. Outback locations are physically and socially separated from their surrounding environs through usage, and the names that accrue through interaction.

Rock Crawlers' view of the outback, "arises out of a restless[ness or] dissatisfaction" with the urban milieu; the outback acts as a temporary "alternative" (Narvaez, 244). This perception is fraught with conflicting ideals. For instance, the existence of the trails bespeaks continuing ventures into the outback. In fact, many trails see heavy usage. As such, they are not the pristine areas they are imagined to be. Furthermore, using and enjoying machinery to access and experience these places also seems paradoxical.

Conflict within a movement, however, does not negate the vitality or beliefs

of that movement.<sup>42</sup> In fact, it has been noted that “Americans have *always* celebrated both the wilderness and the pioneer’s conquest of it” (West, 283, italics added). By looking at the tensions born from conflicts within a world view, researchers can learn what is valued by that culture. Such revelations come by contrasting the conflicting belief systems and studying choices made in efforts to protect the entire belief structure as a unit.

For Rock Crawlers, this process reveals the importance of the outback as a place bounded for escape or diversion from the pressures of the work-a-day world. This land aesthetic focuses upon the back country environment as Other. Rock Crawlers value such alternative places according to two criteria: “awesome challenges” and “stunning surrounding[s]” (Quinnell, 1997b, 50). The need to perpetuate this aesthetic affects the ways Rock Crawlers (individuals and collectively) act within the outback’s boundaries and relate to their vehicles. For instance, vehicles are viewed in ways that negate them as a technological fact. *Tread Lightly!* and other behavior modification strategies help to maintain the illusion of a pristine environment while driving individual trails; they also protect these places for future generations.

Chapter three takes the discussion in a new direction. Where the first two chapters have focused primarily upon metaphors concerning the landscape, chapter

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<sup>42</sup> Discussing the clashing ideals of the industrial revolution, Eugene W. Metcalf writes: “As fervently as Americans welcomed the unprecedented increase of new consumer goods, they were also uneasy with the technology that manufactured them. Fear of dehumanization and standardization was part of the general reaction to the machines. The fear was often voiced that man himself was becoming little more than a machine—a “robot” to use a word that appeared at this time” (204).

three examines how metaphorical and experiential perceptions of the back country's environment provide the impetus for vehicle modification. Thus, these perceptions have a direct affect upon vehicle morphology. The forms of these creations, then, stand as a rhetorical dialogue with the landscape. As such, they can be read like texts, furthering this exploration of the relationship between Rock Crawlers and their environment.



## SECTION 2

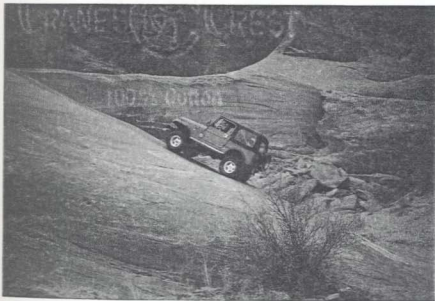
### THE VEHICLES: TRAVERSING THE LAND

The modifications that we've seen over the years to the vehicles, both from a cosmetic standpoint and from a mechanical standpoint, [are] *absolutely* amazing! You see things that you would think would be *impossible* for people to do to their 4-wheel drive vehicles, to come to the red rock country of south-east Utah and climb rocks at three miles an hour. It's amazing, absolutely amazing!

—Chip Brox, *Interview 4/7/1996*

How a group appropriates an artifact and attaches a cultural value to it becomes as revealing as the design of the artifact.

—Gerald L. Pocius, *A Place to Belong: Community Order and Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland.*



A Jeep climbs the *Lion's Back* near Moab, Utah. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

## OUTBACK TERRAIN AND VEHICLE FORM

Creation entails use. Ideas of composition and context interpenetrate in the creative act, so the object is not only in context: context is in object. Art is not mind purely; it is a record of the mind in the world, a blending of will and nature. (Henry Glassie, 1991, 259-60)

The secret to successful four-wheeling is matching the 4x4 to the trail.  
(Brian C. Brennan, 38)

At this point I will "shift gears" to contemplate the affect landscape has upon rock crawling material culture. Although the community celebrates and expresses itself through artifacts in myriad ways (t-shirts, plaques, calendars, trail journals, etc...), my focus here is upon the vehicles. They are, after all, central to the community world view and are, like festivals such as the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers'* *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, products of attitudes concerning the outback. These 4x4s, which were originally mass produced, are reconstructed to conform to the values of the community using them. As such, rock crawling vehicles can be read as texts which articulate these values (Glassie; 1991, 263; Pye, 1968, 33).<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard L. Herman notes: "The use of objects as texts...[is] a central tenet in vernacular architecture and material culture studies, [and] recognizes the communicative

chapter reviews two means of interpreting the outback, and the affect they have upon vehicle construction. (1) *Ontic* impressions, simply stated, are understandings concerning the realities of the landscape. These arise via direct and/or intimate contact with the landscape. (2) *Ad hoc* perceptions concern the qualities socially imparted to the land.<sup>2</sup> Each means of conceptualizing topography has its own affect upon rock crawler (re)construction. Since 4x4s are built to perform within a specific physical milieu, their construction becomes a marker for the values and ideologies of those owning and building them.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion of ontic landscape perceptions focuses on the realities of the harsh driving milieus into which Rock Crawlers venture, and how the ruggedness of the terrain elicits a force upon drivers to modify their rigs (Hufford, 1990, 42). A discussion with R.D. Searle concludes the examination of ontic perceptions. R.D.'s delineation of the features he would include on a Jeep to make it competent for the trails he frequents provides an interesting case study for the interactive relationship between drivers and the outback. Following R.D.'s comments, is a discussion pertaining to ad hoc environmental perceptions, and their affect upon vehicle form. This explores the impact that psychological perceptions of outback space have upon vehicle form. To examine this dynamic, I use the metaphor of a loud conversation

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nature of artifacts" (1995, 225).

<sup>2</sup> For more on ontic and ad hoc perceptions of the physical environment, see: Lightfoot's "Regional Folkloristics."

<sup>3</sup> For a concise description of how intimate knowledge of an environment is revealed through the morphology of objects built to perform there, see: Mary Hufford, "'One Reason God Made Trees': The Form and Ecology of the Barney Bay Sneakbox."

to represent the immensity of the outback spaces. To be an equal or dominant voice in such "conversations" requires specific modifications to one's rig.

Before ontic and ad hoc perceptions of the environment can be investigated, a brief discussion of networking and its place in the building dynamic must occur. Rock Crawlers live in Western American states, consequently new vehicle building ideas not only move through time, but also across great distances. Many modifications are invented specifically for one topographic milieu but are quickly adopted for topographically dissimilar outback locations. The process by which knowledge of these modifications travels from one location to another, and is deemed "important" or irrelevant in each new location, reveals much about the communities involved.

## THE IMPACT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL NETWORKS

Before a discussion of vehicles as reactions to the terrain can be undertaken, it is necessary to explicate the nature of rock crawling informational networks. This is important because Rock Crawlers—like other folk groups—are not a homogeneous or isolated community. They travel widely, and read printed material from magazines and the internet. Individuals take these ideas wherever they roam. Information from popular sources, and from people met at events like the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* and the *Sierra Trek* (among others), finds its way into vehicular construction (F map 1). Such informational transfer is ubiquitous to the rock crawling milieu. In fact it is

an accepted part of the 4x4 build-up process. But applying ideas from one locale to another is contingent upon the applicability of these modifications to one's regional topography. If modifications seem superfluous to a builder's locale, they are not employed.

Although delineating the parameters of this study is straight-forward, describing my informant body is less so, and necessitates a cursory discussion of socialization dynamics within western rock crawling communities. Information presented in the following pages comes primarily from my interaction with Rock Crawlers in the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* club in Utah Valley, Utah (fig: 1.1). However, this is by no means the full extent of my information base. For, rock crawling communities—like other folk groups—are not homogeneous or insular.

Discussing house construction in Calvert, Newfoundland, Gerald Pocius observes: "Any researcher investigating regional architectural traditions in North America would be hard pressed to find forms untouched by international 'styles,' recent technological developments, or a pattern book or two" (1991, 198). Calvert residents are by no means unique in their ability to blend diverging and (seemingly) conflicting styles into a synchronous whole. Rock Crawlers lift ideas from magazines in a process not unlike Pocius' house builders' utilization of pattern books; where Calvert residents synthesize "international" building developments they see while travelling abroad, Rock Crawlers incorporate regional patterns they witness while attending events in locations near and far from home.

Rock Crawlers are extremely mobile:

We often drive several hours and/or hundreds of miles to participate

in various events...The highlight of a year's worth of adventures is, of course, the backcountry trips, where only a high-clearance 4X4 will take you (we Tread Lightly!)-anything to get away from the masses (tourists). (Enemaerke, 10).

This individual and his friends are not anomalies. Texans think little of travelling to Utah to "do" trails. Utah Valley Rock Crawlers Chris Stephens and Charlie Copsey (among others) often load their rigs onto trailers and head to the Baja Peninsula for a weekend with friends from southern California.<sup>4</sup> Drivers from Colorado, like Victor Mokler, travel to South Dakota for the *Dakota Challenge* (F map 1).

During the 1996 *Easter Jeep Safari*, in Moab, Utah, I co-drove with Quinn Mortensen on the *Secret Spire* trail. One of the rigs on that ride had been driven from Maryland to attend. Similar travels are frequently undertaken. Thus the nature of the problem is reiterated: this is not merely a discussion of localized, insular creativity, there is significant transfer of vehicle alteration ideas from one location to another through inter-personal interaction. These folks are from diverse communities spread all over the Western United States (and farther). If new modifications are found to be valuable for traversing a specific terrain--regardless of their source--news of their worth spreads.

Like home renovators or re-builders, vehicle builders are construction innovators that follow "set[s] of models" (Michael Owen Jones, 1980, 339). In home construction, these models are gleaned from any source possible, including:

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence of such mobility is seen in the numbers of Californian members of the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers*, a club located in Moab, Utah. These individuals are not members there due to a lack of club affiliations in California, but due to their extensive interaction with the club in Moab. Likewise, some of my informants in Utah Valley--like Chris Stephens and Charlie Copsey--are members of, or associate with, Californian clubs.

how-to books, magazines, friends and acquaintances with some experience relevant to the particular problem, suppliers (especially knowledgeable people in hardware stores, lumber yards, and plumbing and electrical stores), contractors and designers who are hired to assist or who are asked for estimates and then pumped for information, other houses, tradesmen (observed at work and questioned). (339)

The above list is extensive, and shows the breadth and diversity of sources available to vernacular home builders. The networking process is no less involved for those reconstructing their rock crawler(s). 4x4 builders seek information or advise through friends, local mechanics, specialty shops and outlets, magazines, books, and people on trail rides; these networks also include internet web sites set-up for people building their rigs to share information.<sup>5</sup> At these sites people obtain data about modifications, directions for the building process of specific vehicles, and photos of the finished products.

It is surprising how small the world gets with this type of technology. While searching Rock Crawler internet sites from my computer in St. John's, Newfoundland, I came across photos and information concerning vehicles owned by Shannon Shirk and several of my other informants in Utah. Imagine my surprise when I accessed vintage Bronco information only to see a photo of Shannon on the *Steel Bender* trail, in Moab, Utah. And I was in the photo! Given the benefits of such networking, it is logical to assume that "behavior in [the modification] context is influenced by print, by oral communication, and by objects and activities that are

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<sup>5</sup> Myriad sites exist, some are: <[www.4x44u.com/pub/k2/am4x44u/4x4.htm/](http://www.4x44u.com/pub/k2/am4x44u/4x4.htm/)>, <[www.4X4NOW.com](http://www.4X4NOW.com)>, <[www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/)>, and <[www.jeepunpaved.com/](http://www.jeepunpaved.com/)>. Each of these sites links web surfers to a host of other locations with photos and information.

observed" (Michael Owen Jones, 1980, 339-40).

A Utah Valley Rock Crawler's Samurai modifications exemplify the diverse ways these informational networks function. This individual was determined to create a trail-only 4x4 capable of performing to peak capacity in nearly any situation. While the rig was at *Totally Tubular*, a local off-road oriented shop, having its suspension modified, the owner learned of a modification that prevents front-end hop. This problem is that a Samurai's front tires hop and bounce off the ground as the rig scales extreme inclines. While at an off-road event, this individual had heard of a procedure that involves moving the shackles on the front springs from the front of each spring to their rear (fig. 3.1).

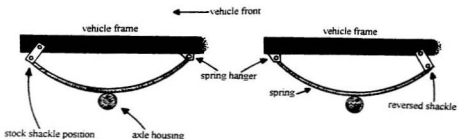
This modification is complex, requiring cutting and welding of the factory spring mounts:

The shackle sitting under the front bumper must be moved to the rear-facing end of the spring. Inversely, the spring mount straight down from the **firewall** must go to the front and will be welded to the frame horn. This moves the pivot point to the rear of the front spring, hence the term shackle reversal. (Pietschmann, 45-6)

He subsequently saw a magazine article detailing a Samurai with this modification; this furthered his interest.

He came to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply* to learn if this was a reliable or efficacious modification. I told him that I had seen many such conversions performed on Samurais and Jeeps and that the new shackle location provides a different angle for spring movement that not only stops front-end hop, but also makes steering slightly more responsive. Excited by this news, this individual went to *Totally*





**FIG: 3.1** Shackle reversals move the shackle from the front of the front spring to its rear.

*Tubular* to work out the plans for the "shackle reversal" on his vehicle.

Prior to undertaking the modifications on his rig, this individual had used three differing information sources from networks to glean useful information about the reconstruction of his front suspension: (1) He talked to people that he met while at an off-road event, (2) he looked in magazines, and (3) he asked people at a local specialty shop what they had heard about this modification. Once his vehicle was completed, he tested the new modification and found it so much to his liking that he advised other Samurai owners to do the same. He then became an integral part of the networking web, disseminating the information about this modification himself.

This example is important to the following discussion because it is by no means atypical. Innovations such as this are learned and spread at every trail ride, and through most magazines dedicated to rock crawling. In fact, such information diffusion is one of the reasons people attend trail rides, or read magazines for that

matter. These interactive matrixes help individuals share similar tastes, aesthetics, and mechanical approaches to specific problems presented by the terrain. Rock Crawlers from Texas, California, New Mexico and other states espouse similar ideas concerning the land, and how it relates to them and their culture. Each of these locations has sub-groups that cling to their own ideas—ideas they share with friends in Wyoming or Arizona—or wherever they travel.

This interaction makes it difficult to assert that I am concerned with purely localized modification strategies. They are, in all reality, not only culled from individuals in the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* of the Utah Valley area but also from multiple others. What makes these “borrowed” ideas regionally specific is that builders only “borrow” the modifications they feel will fit into their topographic context. If a modification seems relevant, it will be added; if deemed superfluous, then it is avoided. (Sometimes ideas are tried and then changed when found to not work). Such choices arise from knowledge and perceptions regarding the terrain.

### **ROCK CRAWLER MODIFICATIONS AS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE “EXPERIENCED” TERRAIN**

Although rock crawling is not relegated solely to the Western United States, it has taken on a form of its own there. Scores of technically advanced and visually exciting vehicles are inevitably under construction in communities boasting significant numbers of Rock Crawlers. And the outback terrain these builders

regularly explore affects their vehicle constructing traditions (Prown, 1982, 6-7).<sup>6</sup> Thus landscape becomes an issue for vehicular morphology because "style comprises...place" (Gerbrand, 59). The importance of the outback landscape to rock crawler design is crucial to this discussion because no material expression of the Rock Crawling community more obviously interprets these spaces than their rigs (Glassie, 1975, 122; Pye, 1964, 46-53).

The similarity of 4x4s clustering in differing regions speaks loudly about the values and needs of the groups from which they spring.<sup>7</sup> It has been asserted that "regional folklore exists in a reflexive relationship with a particular geographic area: a region shapes folklore, and folklore helps shape a region" (Lightfoot, 185). Using this basic assumption, it is not difficult to describe the Rocky Mountain/desert areas in the American West as a rock crawling cultural region comprising interdependent localized groups.

Concerning perceptions of regional distinctions, Yi-Fu Tuan divides regional space into two criteria:

Countries have their **factual** and their **mythical** geographies. It is not always easy to tell them apart, nor even to say which is more important, because the way people act depends on their comprehension of reality, and that comprehension, since it can never be complete, is necessarily imbued with myths. (1977, 98, emphasis added)

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<sup>6</sup> By way of comparison, my limited studies of east coast Rock Crawling reveals that these groups tend to produce vehicles with less elaborate suspension and aesthetic modifications. When modifications similar to western rigs are found, they are often the result of differing terrain-related goals.

<sup>7</sup> This distribution and clustering of vehicle types in differing topographic spaces also appears to support Gerbrand's hypothesis (59).

The sense of region exists in the minds of those who interact with it in two distinct forms: *ontic* and *ad hoc* (Lightfoot, 186). Ontic regions are defined by natural phenomena, such as rivers, mountain ranges, and other geographic occurrences. This coordinates with Tuan's "factual" geography. *Ad hoc*, like Tuan's mythical geography, is a sociological delineation, defined by its existence within the minds of those living in that region.<sup>8</sup> "These geographical, social, and cultural facts combine to manifest what human ecologists call a 'socio-natural system'" (Hufford; 1990, 42).<sup>9</sup>

Individuals living in such socio-natural webs are "bound together" and set apart by the "intimate knowledge they have of the environment and its workings" (42). And, of more importance to the present discussion, this bipartite understanding of space is "fused into a meaningful whole" through the "organization" of materials which culminates in objects like rock crawlers (Upton, 1991, 158-9).

## REALITIES OF THE TRAIL

The 4x4s, called "rock crawlers" by their builders/users, stand as interpretations of the physical environment, acting as information catalogues, storing knowledge and experience gained and shared communally or by individual innovators. They require intimate knowledge of the western American mountain and

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<sup>8</sup> Echoing the notions that region is a set of mythical and factual perceptions, George W. Pierson observes that regions are comprised of "heart and mind" (12).

<sup>9</sup> Edwin Layton argues that objects are imbued with "all kinds of implicit assumptions about man, nature, and society" (173-81).

desert topographies.<sup>10</sup> Ed Isaacson states that nearly all the modifications on his Jeep resulted from knowledge gained through off-road experiences. In other words, obstacles on a given trail or in a specific environment point out the strengths or weaknesses of a rig. One trail may necessitate modifications unnecessary to complete others. Knowing how to interpret the landscape and build one's 4x4 appropriately is an important talent. This "environmental literacy" provides the impetus for new modifications (Ryden, 72). Even choices such as using an automatic or manual transmission can be affected:

You can hold on a steep incline with an automatic transmission...You can hold yourself on [it], and work the vehicle back and forth. Kind of crab it up on some of the steep stuff better with an automatic than with a manual. There's disadvantages to the automatic, but that's one reason why they are being used. (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996)

Changes to the vehicles, in fact the 4x4s themselves, can be seen as indexes of ontic landscape perceptions. In this sense, the vehicles can be read as texts that "serve as portals of entry" (Hufford; 1990, 42)<sup>11</sup> through which the community may be studied and understood because they reveal the groups' "experiential knowledge of place" (Ryden, 73).<sup>12</sup> For instance, the form of Victor Mokler's Jeep becomes a

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<sup>10</sup> Ryden notes that "the specific forms that artifacts take on demonstrate their makers' detailed knowledge of the qualities and demands of their environment: they tailor...artifacts carefully to conform and adapt to the physical conditions imposed by their surroundings" (73). Richard MacKinnon notes that locations and forms of Newfoundland homes in the Codroy valley are changed as a result of knowledge growing from experiences concerning local environment (wind) (35-6).

<sup>11</sup> For more on material culture as portal of entry, see: Ames, 1980; Ames, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Suzi Jones argues that folkloric texts are changed to reflect a folk group's adaptations to specific regional environments. Although she uses this argument to conclude that *regionalization*—and its accompanying boundaries—are the group's

commentary on a few specific outback locations:

Almost all the modifications I've done to my Jeep were spurred by experiences on the trail. I added the **suspension lift**\* and gain **wheel travel**\*. No particular instance [spurred these modifications]. I can remember one particular trip up a local trail near Fort Collins when I was in college. There was a hill with a bunch of holes all the way up. I tried and tried, but I couldn't get up. I kept falling into one or another holes and one of the wheels—or opposite corners—would come off the ground and forward progress would stop. That spurred me to install **swaybar disconnects**\*, longer stainless steel brake lines, and an ARB "Air Locker" in the rear axle. (5/2/1997)<sup>13</sup>

Victor continues by detailing his first trip to *Holy Cross City* (F map 1), an extremely rugged trail. His troubles on the jagged rocks there—like the rocks ripping his shocks off—initiated a host of suspension-related modifications.<sup>14</sup> Additionally,

between the altitude and the steep and off-camber nature of the trail, I had problems with the stock carb[uretor]. Hence, the [addition of] the *Weber* carb. The section of trail above the city on *Holy Cross* was also the point at which I started thinking about how to get lower gearing. Coming down a nasty rock fall I had a hard time going slow enough to avoid bouncing, with the stock T-5 [transmission]. (5/11/1997) (fig: 3.2)

He later replaced the stock "tranny" with one providing much lower gearing.

Victor concludes the narrative: "I would say that my first trip to *Holy Cross City* was a real eye opener for me" (5/11/1997). It was a defining moment that revealed

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response to place, her discussion of folklore as a response to environment is important for understanding a community's material replies to their environment (105-120).

Corroborating Victor's comments, Alfreda Vaughn notes: "The type of accessories [Rock Crawlers] tend to buy depends on the way they actually use their vehicles and...the region in which they live and the terrain in that area" (18).

"Made and used by people, artifacts relate to human values, needs, and concerns...They reflect the spirit of the age, the beliefs of a society, or a subgroup, or the experiences of an individual" (Michael Owen Jones, 1993, 182-95).

the alterations that a fledgling hard-core driver needed to make to enable his 4x4 to master the terrain he was growing to enjoy (table: 3.3). He attests to the fact that "use becomes creation" when he notes that the Jeep's major modifications came as a result of this interaction with a specific back country space (Glassie; 1991, 264).

Jeep vehicles predominate among Rock Crawlers, but there is no single automobile make or model used for rock crawling.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the range of differentiation appears wide when first viewing the spectrum of vehicles. However, there *are* traditional ideals taken into account when individuals commence 4x4 construction. They must have enough ground clearance underneath their bodies to traverse trails without being ripped-up. This necessitates suspension and/or body modifications. To further vehicle stature, while increasing traction in rugged conditions, larger tires with aggressive tread patterns are required. Larger tire circumferences dictate lower than stock gears to throw the vehicle back into its "power band" or zone of greatest torque and horse power. Usually gears in the axles are swapped to accomplish this, however transfer case and transmission modifications can also accomplish the task. For truly "hard core" rock crawling, a *locker\** is installed in at least one axle.

The changes noted above are the rudimentary modifications required on

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<sup>15</sup> The most commonly used vehicles are: Wranglers, CJs and the Cherokees made by Jeep. 1930s-1950s Willy's "Jeeps", vintage model Ford Broncos (1966-77), the early model Toyota Land Cruiser, Toyota pick-ups and 4-Runners, the Suzuki Samurai, and to a lesser extent the full sized pick-ups and sport-utility vehicles (due to their inhibited maneuverability resulting from their size). Since the early 90s the Land Rover Defender 90 and the AM General Hummer have also gained a following.

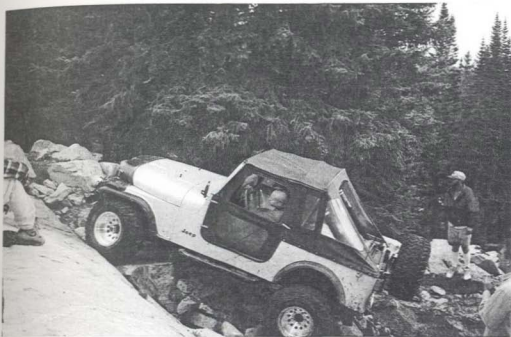


FIG: 3.2 Victor Mokler scales a rocky hill on *Holy Cross City* trail. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)

TABLE: 3.3 Physical environments and the modifications they have mandated on Victor's Jeep.

*OUTBACK CHALLENGE:*

*SOLUTION:*

Avoid bottoming out

Suspension lift

Need for greater wheel travel

Suspension lift

Steep hill with lots  
of ruts and holes

Swaybar disconnects  
Longer brake lines  
ARB "Air Locker"

Off-camber and steep  
trail conditions

Weber carburetor

Steep, rocky, descents

Lower gearing



competently<sup>16</sup> built vehicles; beyond this point there is discussion and debate concerning exactly how these changes should be accomplished, what products should be utilized, and if other fabrications are obligatory.<sup>17</sup> Despite the dialectic concerning fabrication strategies, most drivers would agree that vehicles should be expected to operate reasonably well in most environmental contexts within a region. Victor has commented that although he drives in locations throughout Colorado and Utah, he enjoys “rocks,” and while he has built his rig especially to drive over and through them, he expects it to perform well in other local terrains also.

Others build their rigs explicitly with western environments in mind. These range from sandy desertscapes (there are several types of sand defined by group members), to boulder-strewn mountain passes, to rutted and muddy dirt roads; a vehicle that performs well in snow is also a bonus since many mountain trails are snow-covered for significant portions of the year. Vehicles built with a specific outback in mind—extremely rocky topography for instance—are acknowledged to perform well in the milieu for which they were created:

Many of these rigs were built specifically for the *Dakota Challenge*.<sup>18</sup> The most interesting rock rig at the Challenge was a '76 Bronco driven by Troy Lipert of Williston, North Dakota. The Bronco sported four-wheel steering. Troy had twice the maneuverability of the other rigs as he steered around obstacles. *The best rigs have tall tires, lots of*

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Ann Williams and M. Jane Young provide an excellent discussion on the usage of grammar codes in material culture studies (40-51). Thomas Hubka explores competence and form generation (426-32).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this process, see chapter four.

<sup>18</sup> An off-road event that takes place in Deadwood, South Dakota, within the *Black Hills National Forest*.

*lift, pliant suspensions for maximum wheel travel and locking axles.*  
(Merritt & Owens, 44, emphasis added)

Many of the above vehicles are from states other than the Dakotas; the drivers simply make the trek to this area so they can enjoy these trails. Owners may also construct their rigs with this event specifically in mind. Often, they add modifications to a vehicle so that it may negotiate *one specific* location on a given trail. Participants at the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* sometimes evaluate the "goodness" or "badness" of a given year's safari based upon their ability to negotiate a specific obstacle deemed as their nemesis.

One trail providing such challenges for many Rock Crawlers is *Surprise Canyon*, in the Panamint mountain range of California's desert. It is so difficult that designating it a trail may be seen by some as a liberal statement. Chris Stephens, an experienced and well-known Rock Crawler, commented that during one of his trips up *Surprise Canyon* the four vehicles in his group took eight hours to travel—driving and winching—one 400 yard section! According to Ed Isaacson, Chris almost rolled his Jeep end-over-end while descending a waterfall on one of his *Surprise Canyon* trips. The fact that Chris did not roll attests to his driving skill—and luck. (A home video of this near catastrophe is routinely watched by participants of this ride and their friends.) This near accident was not Chris' fault; the trail is demanding:

The trip is difficult enough for those walking—you use your hands as much as your feet. And the driving is hampered not only by precariously steep angles, but by the constant cascade of water across moss-covered rocks slicker than mule snot...[The] seven waterfalls on the road to Panamint are traversed by winching the vehicles straight up (fig: 3.4). (Mark Vaughn, 14-15)



FIG: 3.4 Damon Neilsen descends *Surprise Canyon* in his Jeep. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

*Surprise Canyon* has become the ultimate test for many Rock Crawlers; to have completed it gives a driver bragging rights. And, like the trails in the *Dakota Challenge*, even attempting the trail mandates specific modifications.<sup>19</sup> Describing the vehicles on his trip, Mark Vaughn notes: "All the vehicles had **winch**\*, **locking differentials**\* front and rear, **roll bars**\*, **air compressors**\*, tool kits, special **high-lift jacks**\* and full loads of camping gear." Sarcastically ribbing the misconception that Rock Crawlers are "rednecks," he finishes the description: "The only thing missing was a gun mount on each roll bar" (15-16).

This rugged trail dictates that specialized products and extensive vehicular

<sup>19</sup> Mary Hufford discusses how technology is modified for usage in *specific* geographical spaces among cranberry bog owners (1985, 22).

modifications be incorporated on rigs venturing there. Winches must be no smaller than 8000lb units; often 4x4s have them mounted front and rear (figs: 3.5, 3.18). These are necessary because in difficult trail sections, where there is no option to turn around, the rig can be winched (pulled) forward or backwards. Most vehicles that frequent this trail also have on-board welding systems in case parts (axles, frames, or steering componentry) break. Vehicle tires 31 inches or taller are required on participating vehicles by most trail leaders. Tires *must* be this size to provide the space under a rig necessary for that rig to clear the sharp rocks comprising the trail. Most vehicles run tires 33 inches or taller.

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**FIG: 3.5** A winch sits above the front bumper of this Jeep. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

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But off-road handling is not all that is required of rock crawling rigs. The majority of them are also used as **daily drivers\***. They must, therefore, tackle daily

trips to the store for groceries, to the library, shuttling kids to and from activities, going to church, etc... Of these demands, Allan Olsen comments:

You know, people are more into the back country exploring. They want a vehicle that will be able to do it, and haul their family, and still drive around town during the week. You know, do the grocery shopping, run the kids to school, and whatever else. (4/12/1996)

A good rock crawler, then, is often a 4x4 orchestrated to perform in a specific off-road milieu while also maintaining comfortable performance on the street.

When asked what makes a good trail rig,<sup>20</sup> individuals responded with answers that not only revealed keen insight into the terrain they travel, but also proclaim the idiosyncratic requirements specific trails place upon their vehicles. I asked Charlie Copsey, a well known driver and fabricator<sup>21</sup> in Utah Valley, what he considers the ideal combination of axle and locker for extreme rock crawling. His answer reveals the balancing act taking place as individuals decide what modification is suited best for the terrain they travel:

Charlie: I think **Dana 44\*** axles are—a super set-up. Ford **9 inches\*** are super set-ups. I like lockers front and rear, but there's arguments against that stuff too. You know—I mean, so it really depends on what you are going to do. But for what I do, I think that's the stuff. I like hard core rock crawling. Mine's [his rig] the pits in the sand. My four-three [his engine displacement]

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<sup>20</sup> David A. Taylor asked Newfoundland boat builders: "What makes a good boat?" He notes that informants had "no difficulty comprehending the question," and provides a detailed response exemplifying their commentaries (1982, 79).

<sup>21</sup> Due to the numbers of people asking assistance from Charlie in their own vehicle modifications, he opened his own shop: *Just 4 Fun Motor Sports*. Charlie specializes in "made to order" fabrications, which he creates after consulting with vehicle owners.

doesn't push it through the sand well with 35 inch [tall] tires.<sup>22</sup>

David: Well, you've got a rock crawler. You *don't* have a...[I would have continued by saying "**Sand-hill climber**," but Charlie anticipated this.]

Charlie: Right. That's why I say its very individual on what you're going to do with the rig. I think that's the first thing you got to do when you design a rig. That's like this Toyota that I'm building over here. [Points to a near by Land Cruiser] I'm putting a fuel-injected V-8 in it and the *Ranger over-drive*<sup>\*</sup>. He keeps looking at all these rock crawling rigs<sup>23</sup> that come in the shop, or this Jeep, or Toyota over here, and he keeps saying; "Do I need this?" You know: "I want to do that." And I have to keep explaining to him, you know, "If you want to spend two thousand dollars on that, and *you're* looking for a *desert* rig, that's two thousand dollars that's not well spent." (7/20/1994)

Rock crawling vehicles emerge from such commentaries as tools orchestrated to perform in the specific extremes individuals meet while in "their" outback. Such crafting blends traditional notions concerning competent performance needs with individual opinions concerning the modification strategies considered to achieve these traditional goals.<sup>24</sup>

I asked R.D. Searle, a Rock Crawler and "vintage" 1971 Bronco owner, if he had a "dream-vehicle" that he would like to build—other than his Bronco. My purpose

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-- Charlie has since built a new vehicle which is discussed later in this chapter and also in chapter four.

<sup>22</sup> Within the gamut of rock crawling rigs there are sub-groups delineated by types of terrain driven or preferred by the driver, ie: *desert trucks* (for those who favor sandy deserts), *rock crawlers* (for those who favor extremely rocky terrain), etc... It should be noted that Rock Crawlers frequent most terrains in their area, but may build their vehicle to the topographic milieu they prefer. [ As can be seen, the term "rock crawler" is layered with meaning, which is determined entirely by context.]

<sup>23</sup> For more on this blend, see chapter four.

in asking this question was that I hoped to elicit an answer detailing a vehicle build-up process specific to the rocky terrain R.D. frequents. R.D.'s response was explicit, providing just what I was hoping for—a catalog of parts and modifications he believes are necessary to venture into the terrain he enjoys. He proceeded, step by step, through an imaginary vehicle construction process.<sup>25</sup> Like all drivers' vehicle constructions, R.D.'s process is idiosyncratic because it is the product of experiences he has had off-road.

I [would] take a *Jeep Scrambler*, because of the wheel base. Put thirty-five inch [tall] tires on it—try to keep the **suspension lift\*** down enough. Put a **fiberglass body\*** on it that allows a *lot* of **wheel travel\*** with the suspension down. In other words, most of my lift would be tire lift. Put a 350 Chev' engine in it, with a throttle-body fuel injection...a newer 350 Chev' engine or maybe a Corvette [tuned-port injection] engine...And then probably I'd put like **Dana 60's\*** in it with **reverse cuts\***, to keep the...drive shafts off the ground and the axles [at the correct angles]. I don't know what I'd use for a **transfer case\*** 'cause I've never really thought about it. But I'd probably go with a five-speed [transmission] with a low first gear...I'd just have [the vehicle axles] low geared, probably four-fifty sixes [4.56:1—this is *extremely* low]. Something like that. So that I'd have plenty of **hold back\***. So all I'd have to do is drop down [off ledges or hills without using brakes]. Probably I'd have a locker front and rear. I'd go for **Air Lockers\*** just for the simple reason you can kick it on and off. (7/30/1994)

R.D.'s lengthy list reveals that his driving preference tends to be in rocky terrain. The first clue resides in his choice of 35 inch tall tires. Tires this tall provide the vehicle height needed to pass over the sharp edges of rocks that might come into contact with the rig along the trail. If he were interested in less arduous terrain

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<sup>25</sup>David Taylor asked similar questions to elicit descriptions concerning proper boat morphologies for specific jobs and/or oceanic conditions (1982, 77-82).

a set of 32 or 33 inch tires could easily suffice; they would give adequate clearance for objects routinely encountered in less rocky or extreme terrain.

The choices he makes to increase his wheel travel also signal plans for a vehicle that frequents "the rocks." Wheel travel is the ability for the suspension to cycle through a large range of movement.<sup>26</sup> The more wheel travel a rig has, the more its wheels stay in contact with the trail, instead of hanging in the air. Keeping wheels on the ground increases control, as well as safety. As long as tires maintain contact with the trail, a rig is likely to move in the direction that the driver wants it to be moving. Extremely rocky trails require extensive wheel travel to negotiate large objects such as rocks, tree stumps, ravines, and other demands (fig: 3.6). Challenges common to such trails stop stock vehicles—with their average wheel travel of four to six inches—dead in their tracks.

Concerning the ultra-modified S-10 Blazer he used to drive, Charlie Copsey estimated: "From pictures, we're guessing we probably [had] between 24 and 28 inches of travel on the front and probably about 16 [inches] in the back." Charlie now owns a Jeep CJ-7 that boasts well over 3 feet of travel per axle. To prove the flexibility of this rig, Charlie "ramped" it for me (fig: 3.7). Ramping a 4x4 is a way to test its wheel travel. This entails running one of the rig's tires up the ramp; the vehicle is driven as far up the ramp as it can go while still keeping *all* other tires in contact with the ground. Using a mathematical equation that takes the wheelbase into account, drivers can learn their "Ramp Travel Index." (The equation is:

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<sup>26</sup> For more on wheel travel, see chapter four.





**FIG: 3.6** Jeff Beach's Jeep—shown here backing up a ramp—has extensive wheel travel. Such vast travel helps to keep the Jeep's tires in contact with the rugged terrain. (Courtesy Jeff Beach)



**FIG: 3.7** Charlie Copsey tests his wheel travel on a specially-constructed ramp. Notice that all tires remain in contact with the ground, providing traction for the Jeep's four corners. (More on "ramping" in chapter four.)

[distance up the ramp in inches] divided by [vehicle wheelbase in inches] = X. X is then multiplied by 1000 = the RTI score. For instance: a Toyota Land Cruiser goes 60 inches up a ramp and has an 85 inch wheelbase; [60 divided by 85 = .7058] x 1000 = the RTI index/score rounded to 706.)

Travel indexes indicate suspension flexibility; a score of 1000 is the best that can be achieved for each wheelbase. The closer one comes to 1000, the better. Charlie's rig ramps 1000. As we stood next to it, he pointed to Shannon Shirk's Bronco, parked near by. "That can do about 800, but we're going to make it do one-thousand." He referred to a host of modifications planned for the rig's suspension to improve its flexibility.<sup>27</sup>

While at the 1996 *Jeep Safari*, I met an individual on *Hell's Revenge Trail* who told me that his custom-built Jeep had over four feet of wheel travel. When I expressed shock--and a little disbelief--at this boast, he drove the bright pink rig crossways over a large ledge. The Jeep twisted, dropping only its driver's side front tire off the ledge. All other tires stayed planted on the trail at the top of the ledge. He slowly drove forward, dropping the passenger's side front tire and the driver's side rear tire over the ledge. At this point, only the rear passenger's side tire remained at the top of the ledge. Still, all tires stayed in contact with the trail. None hung in the air. This rig has the best travel I have ever seen; it is also known to be one of the most competently built crawlers to frequent Moab's trails. To build this

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<sup>27</sup> In recent years, there have been ramps set up at off-roading events. Drivers run their rigs up the ramp in competitions. The highest score wins a prize, and the jealousy of others at the event. Achieving a high ramp index is now a bragging right. This is a relatively new phenomenon, not existing in 1994.

system, the owner combined parts from a host of vehicles—many of them non-Jeep.

Traversing extreme territory usually requires an elaborate suspension lift to give the rig added height.<sup>28</sup> Essentially a suspension lift entails replacing a vehicle's springs with taller ones so that the vehicle will achieve a taller stance. Constructing his own 4x4, R.D. eschews all but minor height increases due to a roll-over that he and his wife had while rock crawling in the mountains near Moab, Utah. Nobody was hurt, and once friends helped him get the Bronco back on its wheels they were able to continue with their trail ride. But the experience caused them to re-think their building strategies. Consequently, they utilize any modifications that add **clearance\*** but are not likely to significantly raise vehicle height or center of gravity. This choice is purely personal for the Searles, as many contemporary rigs are getting taller than was previously thought to be acceptable for good back country performance.

R.D.'s choice of a fuel injected motor also falls into line with the requirements of extremely rocky terrain. Carburetors "flood" when a vehicle is bouncing up and down or side to side. Flooding occurs when gasoline sloshes out of the carburetor instead of going down into the motor. When this happens the engine becomes "fuel starved" and "dies" (or "konks out") because it is not getting the gas. The reason for this problem is inherent to carburetor design.

A "carb" is nothing more than several bowls that are filled with gasoline by the fuel pump. Gas from these bowls—most carbs have between one and four—is sipped down into the engine. This design is fine for paved roads, but when terrain becomes

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<sup>28</sup> Suspension lifts will be discussed at length in chapter four.

broken or extremely steep the gas spills out of these bowls. To understand how the gas sloshes out of the carb's bowls, think of a toddler eating his/her food from a bowl. The baby bumps and plays with the bowl while eating. How much of the food actually ends up in the child's mouth and how much ends up on the floor within a six foot radius of the high-chair? Apply this image to carburetion while off-road.

One rough trail caused my Bronco's carburetted engine to die more than 60 times in a three hour period.<sup>29</sup> Not only is this problem a nuisance on rugged trails, it can prove dangerous. In a precarious position, an engine dying could cause human or vehicular casualties. Remember: steering and braking are often controlled by pressure or power generated by a turning motor. Such dangerous instances never occur with fuel injection. When gas sloshes out of a carburetor while bouncing over a rock, or climbing straight up a hill, fuel injectors continue pumping the gas directly and smoothly into the engine. In fact, many fuel injected motors can even run if a vehicle is *upside down*. This ability makes them one of the most important modifications Rock Crawling addicts can make to their vehicle(s).

A common addition to many Jeeps and Land Cruisers now is a fuel injected motor from a Corvette or a Camaro. These reliable engines are fairly easy to come by, provide excellent power, and can be implanted in the back yard, or by most local garages. Many vintage-style Bronco owners use the fuel injected motors from Mustangs to replace their carburetted units.

Quinn Mortensen drives a fuel injected rig. Although his previous Bronco had

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<sup>29</sup> Causing me to modify my fuel delivery system for more reliable off-road handling.

a carburetted engine that ran extremely well, he informed me that fuel injection provides "a much more controlled ride off-road" (fig: 3.8). Charlie Copsey, Chris Stephens and Jim Broadbent, all commented similarly about their own 4x4's. Chris states that fuel injection is one of the most important modifications a driver can make to a rig. One of the most frequent swaps on contemporary rock crawlers is a fuel injected motor implant. The Nielsen family, members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*,

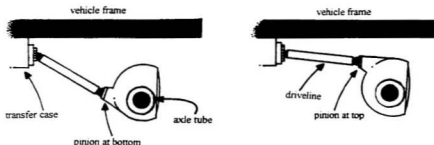


**FIG: 3.8** Fuel injection keeps Quinn's Bronco running smoothly, especially when he is on steep inclines.

took a carburetted V6 motor that worked fine on the street out of their rig to implant a fuel injected V6 in its place. Jack Nielsen comments: "It's the best thing we ever did" (12/18/1997). This process is not unusual, fuel injected motors are more reliable in the outback, consequently they are found with increasing regularity in rigs that routinely venture there.

R.D.'s axle and gearing choices also reveal that he has rocky terrain in mind. Dana 60 axles are ultra-heavy duty units commonly found on three-quarter ton and one-ton trucks. Such strength serves well under the immense stresses placed upon parts in extremely arduous terrain. Dana 60s are also made of heavier gauge steel, rendering them nearly impervious to breakage when "crunched" against rocks. That R.D. wants the axles "reverse cut" means they have the drive shaft input, or "pinion," relocated to the top of the differential instead of the at the bottom. This modification requires special "reverse-cut" gears since the axle is essentially upside down. (If the new gears were not used, the vehicle would try to go backwards when the driver wanted to go forwards.) This expensive process lessens the likelihood of rocks bending the drive shafts since they are now farther from the ground. It also keeps the drive shaft angles from being too "steep" (fig: 3.9). The angle a drive shaft enters a differential is of major concern when raising the height of a rig; angles that are acute lead to "binding," gradually destroying drive shaft parts with use. Adding reverse cut axles lessens this problem.

Placing "low" gearing in the vehicle gives it power at low speeds or low engine rpm's. This aids when climbing steep inclines or large rocks. Low gears also provide "hold back" or "compression gearing." This is the ability to create engine back-pressure with low gearing in order to slow the vehicle down, rather than using the brakes. In some off-road situations utilizing one's brakes can prove hazardous or fatal. Such dangers can occur when driving down a hill so steep that if brakes are used the rear tires might lift off the ground. Compression braking is important because it slows the vehicle without the loss of control that can be created by using



**FIG: 3.9** A standard rotation axle is on the left. A reverse cut (reverse rotation) axle is on the right. Notice differences in the angle that drivelines enter. Reverse cut axles also keep the driveline farther from the ground the brakes.

R.D.'s final point concerns **lockers**<sup>30</sup>. Lockers keep both wheels on an axle constantly rotating with power.<sup>30</sup> This does not occur with factory-equipped axles; these only spin one tire per axle (even on 4-wheel drive vehicles). If a tire ends up in the air—which occurs regularly in extremely rocky terrain (figs: 3.10-3.12)—a locker ensures that power still gets to the other tire on that axle, rather than merely spinning the airborne one. Combined with extended wheel travel, lockers guarantee that each axle is continuously pulling the vehicle in the direction intended by the driver. In extremely rocky terrain lockers are not a luxury, they are a necessity.

R.D.'s answer, as discussed above, reveals much concerning the terrain he knows best. Yet, some drivers are not so extensive in their basic requirements. Chris Stephens is widely recognized as a trail leader for the *Hell's Revenge* trail at

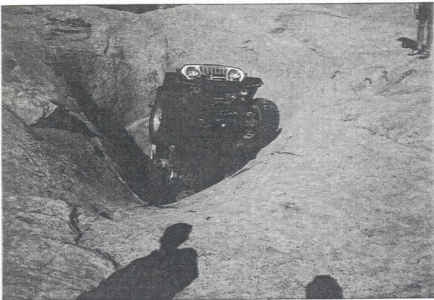
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<sup>30</sup> Lockers will be discussed at-length in chapter four.



**FIG: 3.10** Glenn Wakefield gets a rear tire airborne on the *Pritchett Canyon* trail in Moab. Locker-equipped rigs are more likely to get out of such situations under their own power than those without lockers. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))





**FIG: 3.11** A Jeep gets one tire air-borne as it climbs out of a “tub.” Lockers make climbing from the tub possible (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



**FIG: 3.12** On *Sledgehammer* trail, Jim shows that even 4x4s with lots of suspension travel sometimes “lift” tires. Lockers in both axles help him pull through this situation with no problems (Courtesy Jim Cole)

the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*<sup>21</sup> who has a considerably modified rig. It was even shown in a 1996 magazine detailing the year's *Jeep Safari* action. According to Chris: "I think the two most important things would be front and rear lockers, and fuel injection" (7/1994). It is interesting that his 1976 Jeep CJ-7 has (among other changes) the following fabrications: a tuned-port fuel injected Corvette motor, a heavy duty **Ford 9 Inch\*** rear axle, lockers in both axles, an automatic transmission from a Chevrolet pick-up truck, a reinforced frame, a custom built roll-cage, and seats from a 1993 Saturn. Yet, the modifications he considers crucial for traversing extremely rocky terrain are the fuel injection on his motor and the lockers in his axles. He asserted that it was *these* modifications, combined with his later addition to the list of "an automatic transmission," that made him feel he could "rely on [his] Jeep" off-road (7/1994).

All these modifications must be carefully balanced against each other so that a working vehicle emerges from the "build-up," or building process. Faced with the query, "What is the most important modification on your Samurai?" Glenn Wakefield replied:

Which of your children is your favorite? You can't ask a question like that! They all interconnect, and *it depends heavily on the type of trail and terrain you enjoy*. For my type of stuff, I'd have to say that gearing is the first thing that anyone should modify. With proper gears, you can go slow enough to get over most mild obstacles without smashing your vehicle, by hammering away—trying to get up something...even if you lack somewhat in clearance. Next would be to improve your clearance—lift [and] tires, followed by traction adding devices in your diff's [differentials]. Now *if I was a mid-western farm boy who played in the mud, the most important thing would be to get*

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<sup>21</sup> The *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* will be discussed in chapters five and six.

*a big set of 'meats [tires] to go to the nearest bog.* Different strokes for different folks. (10/24/1996, italics added)

Assertions by Charlie, R.D., Chris, and Glenn prove that when "we begin to learn about consumers is when they abandon the role of consumer and become creators" (Glassie, 1991, 263). The vehicular modifications these Rock Crawlers consider pertinent do not coincide with those of the average auto owner; rather, they reflect the harsh trail conditions of the outback into which they venture and know. But Rock Crawlers' rigs are not solely the product of direct interaction with the land, interaction which is *ontic*. The vehicles are also the product of *ad hoc* spatial perceptions. These perceptions are imbued with the ideals and myths alluded to by Tuan's assertion that "countries [and by extension, regions] have their...mythical geographies" (1977, 98).

## ROCK CRAWLERS AND THE PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENT

The perceived, or *ad hoc*, view of the environment in which one lives and 4-wheels is also crucial to vehicular construction; this context refers to the "psychological environment in which the group operates" (McCarl, 1974, 248). This is different from *ontic* understandings which result from physical experiences in the back country topography. *Ad hoc* perceptions, instead, arise from psychological impressions of these spaces. Such impressions entail beliefs about how and why a space is the way it is. They may even construe the reasons why this space is

different or more important than other locations.<sup>32</sup> These impressions can indicate “emotions...local residents attach to place, feelings which arise from a knowledge of place-based history and identity and which inevitably tinge their contemplation of their physical surroundings” (Ryden, 66). Rock crawling vehicles arise from these perceptions; being reactions to impressions concerning the nature of back country spaces, they are the concretion of these values.<sup>33</sup>

Such impressions inform vehicle morphology and aesthetics. They also provide, among other things, the impetus for vehicle height, tire tread styles,<sup>34</sup> the usage of chrome and other polished surfaces, both faux and functional body armor, and—above all—paint schemes. This occurs because the rigs are “symbolic systems that facilitate folk expression on...deeply felt communal level[s]” (Poulsen, 10).

In her discussion of Barnegat Bay sneakboxes and their relationship to the landscape, Mary Hufford comments: “Not only does the sneakbox play an important role in the task of self-definition, but it enhances the experience of losing oneself, an avowed function of the meadows for men in the region” (1990, 52). She elaborates upon this point, discussing the means New Jersey hunters use to camouflage these small hunting boats. When finished, a craft and its owner fully blend into their

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<sup>32</sup> See: Ryden, 83-4, 86.

<sup>33</sup> William D. Moore presents an intriguing discussion concerning how Masonic lodge forms at the turn of the century were influenced by masons’ perceptions of masculinity in a changing social dynamic. Although his discussion does not take landscape into account, it *does* show the interaction between group *perceptions* of the surrounding world and the morphology of the objects they create (26-39).

<sup>34</sup> A study of tire tread designs, and their significance to drivers, would be a study in its own right.

marshy hunting environment. Like rock crawlers, this technology helps individuals escape from every-day life. But in the end this example contrasts sharply with that presented by the rock crawling tradition.

It is true that Rock Crawlers create their vehicles as a means for escaping into a symbolic landscape offering seemingly unlimited space—space in which they could lose themselves. However, this is not the case. Instead, rock crawlers are often painted and/or decorated in ways that “shout” their presence, creating a situation diametrically opposite to that sought by sneakbox craftsmen.

The rigs exist within a metaphorical dialogue. This “conversation” involves the land, the myth of the open spaces and freedom of the West, and the Rock Crawlers’ answer to these “identities” through 4x4 construction (Baudrillard, 61). The height, bold paint schemes, and flashy modifications utilized in their creation are responses to challenges arising from the perception of this set of identities. An experience I had during the 1994 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* illustrates this concept. I had just returned to Moab with my wife, Becci, after a day of desert crawling with the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*. As we trundled down the street looking into shop windows, two acquaintances approached us. They excitedly commented that they had seen us on the trail that day. I asked where, since I knew they had not travelled with our group, and I had not seen them elsewhere. Their response indicated that they had been miles away, but had recognized the unmistakable paint scheme of our Bronco as we inched over a sandstone fin\* further out in the desert.

When we engage in a verbal conversation with more forceful or loud

individuals we must become more vocal to make ourselves heard. Rock Crawlers experience a similar situation in the back country. The power of the land's (real and/or perceived) immensity is a "big voice" (figs: 3.13, 3.14). To assert their place in this "conversation," drivers make their rigs stand out by making them what one individual at the 1994 *Jeep Safari* referred to as "bigger than life." The 4x4s must fill this space; they must assert the owner into the outback scenario so that s/he may stand as an equal—or more powerful—voice.<sup>35</sup> Our two friends had seen us because we were, as it where, as big as the rest of the desert that day; we were a powerful voice within the dialogue. Many drivers build their rigs similarly, trying to create rigs that shout their presence into the immensity of the outback space.

A magazine article reviewing a 1941 Willy's MB Jeep notes the rig's body and paint modifications: "[The builder] wanted to paint the body a bright color that would stand out in the back country, and, after some research, settled on 1977 Corvette Yellow. The results speak for themselves" (Philips, 49-50). What is not written, but is revealed in the pictures, is that the vehicle's roll cage and bumpers are painted metallic gold. The combination of yellow and gold truly makes the rig pop out from the desert topography. Asserting that the vehicle was painted specifically to stand out in the back country is not surprising, and supports the idea that drivers feel constrained to powerfully interject themselves into a milieu that might subdue their "voice."

Vehicles are often graced with eye-grabbing colors and bold paint schemes.

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<sup>35</sup> Roger M. Downs and David Stea discuss scale and its relation to the perception of environment (64-6).

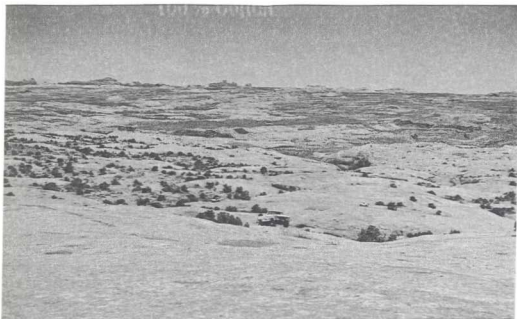


FIG: 3.13 Large spaces could overwhelm Rock Crawlers. Bold paint schemes help to prevent this.

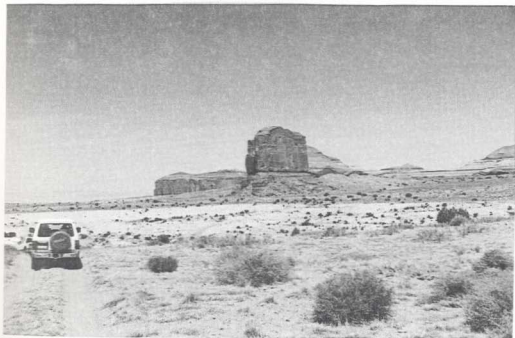


FIG: 3.14 Large expanses such as this one tend to make people feel small and/or insignificant.

Kitsch colors like bubble-gum blue, "slime" green, canary yellow, and "boo-berry" purple commonly appear. Many rigs gleam under the sun with bright reds and oranges; white is commonly used (figs: 3.15-3.23). Often drivers paint their 4x4s with contrasting colors. For instance, Charlie Copsey's Jeep is bright yellow with bright blue thunderbolts running over its hood (figs: 4.36, 4.37). The combination of yellow and blue creates an effect that truly stands out. Allan Olsen, a Jeep Cherokee owner, achieved an eye-gripping effect by painting all the accessories on his white rig black. The contrast between these opposites is heightened by a single teal stripe down the side of the vehicle (fig: 3.24). On many rigs, anything that can be painted is given a matching coat, tying the vehicle into a unified whole. Such paint schemes create vibrant displays that stand out in any landscape.

Many drivers do not consciously try to build rigs that shout their presence. Commenting on what he has done to make his Samurai aesthetically pleasing, Glenn Wakefield indicates his pragmatic approach to vehicle aesthetic properties:

Not much. I covered up a big rusty area with the front bra.<sup>36</sup> I paint over body rust with a can of red paint that looks similar to the stock color—but isn't. I paint the bumpers black when I scrape them on rocks...I'd rather spend time 'wheeling than buffing the vehicle. (10/29/1996)

Although at first Glenn seemed completely function-oriented in his estimation of vehicle aesthetics, a slightly different tone emerged when I asked him if his red paint was the stock color: "Yes. At some point I think I'm going to go for something a little

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<sup>36</sup> A bra is a vinyl covering that stretches over the front of a vehicle to protect it from road debris flipping up from other cars' tires. Off-roaders occasionally use them to protect the front of a vehicle from branches or rocks along trails.



more wild—like maybe a giraffe or leopard paint job. As it is now, I just don't want to take the time [to paint it]. Too many other hobbies" (10/29/1996).

For Glenn, like many other Rock Crawlers, function seems to be the priority when it comes to vehicle creation: "In my club—we spend time building performance mods [modifications]. I only know a couple [people] that actually really spend time on aesthetics" (10/29/1996). However, eventually having a "wild" paint scheme will help to assert Glenn's presence. It is important to understand that Glenn is like most other serious Rock Crawlers in that paint and graphics are secondary to performance. Although modifications must be functional and aesthetically pleasing, the actual paint job is usually done last, after important mechanical modifications have taken place. This practice is opposite to some auto-enthusiast groups, who undertake paint jobs early in the modification process. As far as paint is concerned, many Rock Crawlers would "rather see some scratches and dents from a rig that sees rocks, than some bitchin' behemoth that only sees Main Street" (Glenn Wakefield, 10/29/1996).

During the summer of 1997 Glenn began a major rebuild on his Samurai. This originated with the purchase of a new "plain-black ding and rust-free body" that he acquired for three-hundred dollars. Despite assertions about his pragmatic building habits, the body did not stay plain or black for long. As part of a host of other modifications, Glenn had it sprayed "Jeep Citron Pearl Green." This color is nearly impossible to miss, and adds weight to his comment that:

Each vehicle has its own "look." I like 4x4s that show an owner's individuality. I'm tired of the standard old [Jeep] with 33 inch [tall] BFG's [tires]. Boring! And they wonder why their rig never gets into



FIG: 3.15 Colorful Land Cruisers wait in a line-up for the *Rubicon* Trail. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))



FIG: 3.16 A yellow *Rubicon*-bound Land Cruiser with its matching trailer. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))



**FIG: 3.17** This bright-pink Jeep boasts a hand-built body and custom-fabricated extended-travel suspension.



**FIG: 3.18** Brad Nelsen's red CJ-7. Brad even painted the Jeep's axles to match the body.



FIG: 3.19 An orange Land Cruiser drives over Moab Sandstone. Notice the aluminum-protected corners.



FIG: 3.20 Notice the care taken to even pinstripe this Jeep's frame with yellow, red, and blue.



FIG: 3.21 This Cherokee boasts a "break-away" paint scheme borrowed from low rider tradition.



FIG: 3.22 The bright blue body on Jim's Jeep stands out in the *Jackhammer* trail outback. (Courtesy Jim Cole)



FIG: 3.23 Bright red race-style bumpers on Quinn's Bronco help it to stand out. (Courtesy Quinn Mortensen)

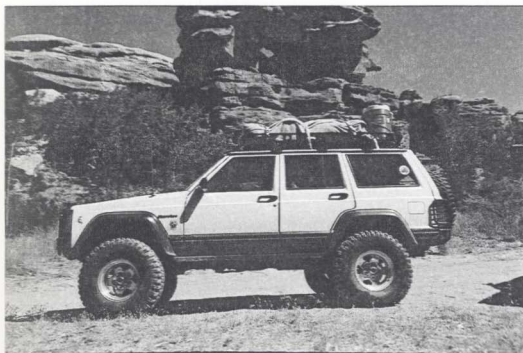


FIG: 3.24 Allan Olsen's white Jeep Cherokee.

the mags [magazines]. Get something different and be unique.  
(Glenn Wakefield, 10/29/1996)

It is not uncommon to see rigs standing out with more than mere bright colors, they visually scream with flame jobs, scallops, and all manner of striping (figs: 3.25-3.29). Most of these designs stand out because of contrasts created by the colors and angular shapes used. A current trend involves painting rigs with animal-print patterns.<sup>37</sup> During the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* vehicles painted in zebra stripes, giraffe spots, tiger stripes, leopard prints, and even cow spots were easy to locate (fig: 3.28). One vehicle, entitled "Old Dog," sported what was purported to be a dog spot pattern. These wild prints make vehicles stand out in the desert, and even in the most dense forest. When trail rides comprising vehicles painted in such a fashion string through the back country, they are visible for miles. Individual rigs can be distinguished from equally far; they stand in vivid contrast to the landscape.

Flashy alterations are not solely accomplished with paint, but can be achieved with the usage of other items which Ed Isaacson calls "doo-dads." Doo-dads are "glitzy" add-ons like door hinges or body panel plating which are made from stainless steel, aluminum, "diamond plate," or chrome, and make rigs stand out even more. Often these additions are functional, but their aesthetic quality is just as important, if not more so, than the objects' overt function (fig: 3.30). In this sense, these body

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<sup>37</sup> This could visually link the vehicles with habit that many drivers have of conflating their rig with images of frontier animals. The dynamic existing between the animal husbandry of the frontier West and contemporary rock crawling rigs is discussed at length in chapter two.



**FIG: 3.25** Two Jeeps with scalloped paint. This pattern is also known as the “modified flame-job.” (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



**FIG: 3.26** A red and white scalloped Jeep awaits trail action at a hotel parking lot in Moab. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)





FIG: 3.27 Jon Stephens' Jeep CJ-7 and its immaculately painted flame job.



FIG: 3.28 A Jeep Cherokee with giraffe spots. Many wild prints like this show-up at the safari.



FIG: 3.29 A flame job bearing Jeep Wrangler tackles the *Jackhammer* trail. (Courtesy Jim Cole)



FIG: 3.30 A chrome grille, chrome *nerf bars*\*, chrome bumper and polished aluminum rims give the Neilsen's Jeep, which is built for heavy rock crawling, a flashy and tough look.

modifications can be viewed in part as "fiction" (Batchelor, 68-9).<sup>38</sup> That is, their rugged appearances often do not have as much to do with protecting the rig as they do with "suggesting the imagined excitement" (68) of a **bullet proof** 4x4 that is "bigger than life."

A prime example of this "fiction" is using polished diamond plate aluminum. This plating, which sports a raised diamond-check pattern across its surface, is applied generously to many rigs and is commonly found along vehicle rocker panels and rear corners (fig. 3.19). If the vehicle contacts a rock, the diamond plate takes the abuse rather than the body to which it is attached. Although it is used to protect the vehicle from rocks, the plating looks rugged, and makes the 4x4 shine and glimmer in the sun. It is frequently applied to many places, functional or not, where sunlight might strike it. In fact, many vehicles actually have whole body panels constructed from this shiny material, making them hard to miss. Diamond plating also finds its way into vehicle interiors—places where trail rocks are not likely to hit.

Like diamond plate, chrome is similarly used to dress-up rigs. Chrome (and stainless steel, which looks like chrome, but does not rust) may find its way to bumpers, rear-view mirrors, lights, **nerf bars**\*, door hinges, and even shock absorbers. However, chrome is usually eschewed on load-bearing components like drive shafts or axles, and also on roll bars.<sup>39</sup> This is because the chroming process

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<sup>38</sup> Jean Baudrillard refers to such "fiction" as "formal connotation," and notes: "Tail fins [on American cars] were a sign not of *real* speed but of a sublime, measureless speed. They suggested a miraculous automatism, a sort of grace" (59).

<sup>39</sup> Chroming such parts is common, however, among the *show-truck* circuit (a differing off-road oriented folk group).

weakens metal by up to 20 percent. Weakening parts which are routinely placed under immense pressure off-road is dangerous and counter-productive. This furthers the idea that many of the dress-up items are used more for maintaining a "look" than for function.

Ed Isaacson dressed his Jeep CJ-7 with chrome highlights such as the front grille, rear-view mirrors, door hinges, hood hinges, nerf bars, and bumpers. Aluminum diamond plate "tall comers" cover the rear corners of the Jeep, protecting them from rocks. But Ed told me there is another reason for their presence; they hide some "big dings" that were made on the *Sledgehammer* trail. These "doo-dads" contrast, and offset, the rig's metallic blue paint. The combination of blue paint, and functional but gleaming body armor, makes the unit stand out while off-road.

To round out the package, Ed added polished aluminum rims. The combination creates a rig that is functional and aesthetically pleasing. (During the Summer, 1998, he repainted his Jeep teal green). Most drivers opt for aluminum or chromed rims. Like many other additions, these rims are primarily for aesthetic purposes. They do not perform better than a similar sized standard steel rim, but they do offer more flash. They add a final stroke to the palate which has become the artist's masterpiece. And like the other aesthetic additions, they help drivers to assert themselves in the immensity of the back country that might swallow them.

An example of similar dialogic interaction with one's surrounding landscape is revealed in the architecture of the American mid-west. Structures such as silos, water towers, and other "assertive" edifices declare or pronounce the human element into the overwhelming plains of the mid-western states (Wright, 75).

There's a simple reason for the grain elevators, as there is for everything, but the forces behind the reason, reason behind the reason, is the land and the sky. There is too much sky out there, for one thing, too much horizontal, too many lines without stops, so that the exclamation, the perpendicular had to come. Anyone who was born and raised on the plains knows that the high false front on the Feed Store, and the white water tower, are not a question of vanity. It's a problem of being. Of knowing you are there. (75-6)

Although the mid-west plains situation is not an exact parallel to that existing in the Western mountains or deserts, the immensity of the terrain evokes similar emotions. In an overwhelming land reverberating with excessive "volume," individuals in these towns assert themselves in ways similar to Rock Crawlers. Breaking the rhythm and continuity of that immensity with emblems of self is a means drivers use to keep themselves from being consumed within the "volume" of this space.

Folk housing in Utah has been observed to follow the same dialogic aspects, asserting oneself with a powerful landscape:

A house does not mean, but says. Placement of chimneys and other acts of folk building may have important functions as psychological boundary markers. They say...this is what I am, this is what I mean--what else could I be? What else could I mean? (Poulsen, 6)

The structures, then, become more than effigies standing against the onslaught of a symbolically overpowering environment. They reveal psychological boundaries erected by symbolic object utilization; they delineate and assert individuals within the context of their society and *environment*.

4X4s built by off-roaders from the mid-western states provide a nice foil to the present Western Rock Crawler discussion. The sparse trees and dearth of mountainous terrain in the mid-west has generated a vehicle style appearing to thrive there more than in any other region of the United States. These are the

outrageously tall show and monster trucks like "Bigfoot," "USA 1," "Extreme Overkill," and other giants made famous by extensive media coverage (figs: 3.31, 3.32). Such vehicles, too, are products of a socio-environmental dialogue. The enormity of the smooth and open landscape, when combined with a lack of large trees to break-up the sky, produces overriding vehicle building goals centering upon achieving "nose bleed" height and excessively flashy paint (which is considered tawdry by many Rock Crawlers). Within their group, such modifications are status symbols. More than likely such lavish excess results from the need to assert themselves into the expansive mid-western environmental milieu.

Echoing Chris Stephens, who calls such rigs "utterly useless," many Rock Crawlers laugh at these vehicles. In their world such monstrous trucks *are* utterly useless because their size prevents access to much rock crawling terrain. One afternoon, a *Mountain West Off-Road Supply* customer brought his ultra-tall show truck to the store to show off its progress. Standing nearly 10 feet tall on its huge tires, the truck's chrome gleamed above the tops of the other rigs in the parking lot. As he pulled away from the store, Quinn Mortensen looked at me and breathed a sigh of relief. Then he commented on the rig as a waste of time and money. He wondered why someone would expend so much effort on a 4x4 he "could not use."

Rock Crawlers view a 4X4 that is modified but not taken off-road as a tragic squandering of time, money, and a vehicle. Many fail to understand why individuals work so hard to create such a "waste." These sentiments echo the observation that group-specific "forms" are often "meaningless to the outside observer because of his lack of interaction with them, but [are] no less viable in their respective positions with



FIG: 3.31 Monster truck *Red Rock* gets ready for a performance in St. John's, Newfoundland.



FIG: 3.32 The *Undertaker* dwarfs the man guiding the driver into the arena at St. John's, Newfoundland.

the group" (McCarl, 1974, 246). For mid-western builders, monster-sized trucks are logical and valid expressions. With the rock crawling milieu they are not. Due to contrasting social outlooks concerning the topography, and the importance 4x4s within these contexts, different groups create very different types of rigs.

Discussing Howard Wight Marshall's work with basket maker Earl Westfall, John Michael Vlach notes that belief influences a craftsperson's creative process:

A man with deep-rooted religious convictions, [Earl] sees basketry as descending from the "old Bible days." Thus, his work and his belief reinforce each other, because every basket perpetuates a "Biblical tradition" while simultaneously his religion validates his basket making. (303)

In a process not unlike Earl's basket weaving, Rock Crawlers' vehicles are products of their beliefs regarding expansive nature of the back country.<sup>40</sup> A twofold benefit results from this traditional creation process: (1) beliefs involving the land affect vehicle creation and morphology, and (2) the existence of the rigs serves to bolster and perpetuate the values from which they arose. The circularity of this process not only ensures the strength of the ideals involved, but also creates a tightly knit group with values that are spoken as loudly through their material culture as their oral genres.

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<sup>40</sup> Jules David Prown provides an excellent discussion of material culture approaches to the study of how objects relate to the beliefs and values of their owners and/or crafters (1982, 1-19).



## CONCLUSION

The idea that objects communicate their creators' ethos is not foreign to cultural studies. As early as 1974 Robert McCarl argued that welders in a machine and welding shop actively engaged in "a communicative process" each time they exercised their trade (243). He elaborated upon this theme by asserting that their "product and process" were both "a means of communication" (244). Similarly, Rock Crawlers fashion rigs that reveal their "intricacy of local knowledge of the nature and physical properties...of the[ir] geographical milieu" (Ryden, 63). Because of this communication, the 4x4s function as symbols,<sup>41</sup> uttering community values concerning the landscape. Because meaning is "stored in symbols," rigs assert what Rock Crawlers are, what they prize, and what they believe in (Geertz, 1968, 303).

The vehicles comprise two distinct interpretations of the landscape: ontic (experience-derived) and ad hoc (mythic). Hence, each vehicle can be read as a witness of both personal interpretations of the specific outback spaces a driver frequents and general communal-based ideals concerning the region. As such, "form and style remain fundamental indicators of pervasive cultural values" (Pocius; 1995, 419). Form and style do not result from a passive process. Rather, they are at the forefront of each rig's grammar because "material folk culture is a direct product of the symbolic process" (Poulsen, 71). Thus, rock crawlers represent much

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<sup>41</sup> Prown discusses objects as "metaphors which conform to the shape of experience," this is part of his assertion that objects are symbolic realizations of "beliefs" and "values" (1991, 149).

more than simple 4-wheel drive vehicles, they symbolize understandings arising from interaction with the outback,<sup>42</sup> and the mythic, taken-for-granted, beliefs regarding such spaces.

Now that general ideas surrounding the relationship between vehicle and topography have been introduced, a more in-depth discussion of vehicle construction can ensue. Chapter four investigates how the performance and design of each competently built rock crawler results from a culturally understood vehicle fabrication grammar. Individual builders formulate their rigs by employing myriad strategies to accomplish this conservative morphology (structure). The utilization of such strategies combines culturally held notions concerning proper 4x4 form with personal gestalts of how this form is best achieved. Of course, intimate knowledge of the outback landscape through which the vehicle builder travels exerts a constant force in this process.

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<sup>42</sup> For more on this see: Kenneth L. Carper's "Building as A Response to Technological and Creative Processes," and Tom J. Bartuska's "The Fitness Test: Building as A Response to Human-Environmental Factors."

## PERFORMANCE AND DESIGN IN ROCK CRAWLER MORPHOLOGY

Hard-core people want racing shocks, sophisticated lift kits, high-end suspension components, armor plates, winches and products that allow for [a] locking or limited slip differential. (Steve Benevise: quoted in Alfreda Vaughn, 19)

Three vehicles methodically scratch their way along an arduous trail deep within the western California desert. Hardly recognizable as a trail, their path is a conglomeration of silt-like sand, slippery creeks, waterfalls, and boulders ranging from the size of bowling balls to those as big as the automobiles themselves. The trail is made more difficult by the canyon's towering rock walls; their jagged stone prohibiting the travellers from bypassing any difficulties. These walls exact a heavy toll upon the body-work of any vehicle unlucky enough to slide against their rough-hewn edges. Despite the foreboding composition of the route, each vehicle successfully negotiates the trials they encounter.

The lead vehicle crawls over a deep crack in the granite surface, plunging the driver's side front tire deep into the crevice. Dropping three feet below the vehicle's body, the tire contacts the bottom, spins slowly, and catches on a ledge. Traction gained from the ledge pulls the vehicle safely over the gaping maw of jagged rock.

The second vehicle straddles a four foot wide and six foot deep gap between two Volkswagen Bug-sized boulders by placing a tire on each of the boulders and climbing them like stone "ramps." The final rig edges along a stream to the base of an eight foot waterfall; slowly its tires spin until it gains traction on the wet rocks and edges its nose up the face of the waterfall. When the front tires reach the top edge the rig is nearly vertical. A quick burst of gas from the driver and the rig heaves up and over the top. Each 4x4 has passed through the difficult sections unscathed.

This fictitious--yet common--event demonstrates the realities of rock crawling. Outback driving takes patience, sensitivity to changes and subtleties in the terrain, and guts. But no matter how gutsy or talented a driver is, if his/her rig is not equal to the challenge the driver is doomed to failure and possible injury. The ability to combine specific modifications that create a rig capable of negotiating back country challenges is a hallmark of competent Rock Crawlers.

This chapter considers these individuals as bricoleurs,<sup>1</sup> or vernacular designers who utilize a negotiation process involving conservative and innovative ideas. This approach offers insight into the complex assemblage process they undertake. Successful 4x4 "build-ups," as this process is called, do not occur haphazardly. Rather, Rock Crawlers have "rigorous, highly structured design methods for generating and refining" vehicle forms (Hubka, 426). Using mental templates (Glassie: 1975, 17; Hubka, 429), or basic design forms which Rock

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss originated the idea of the vernacular builder as bricoleur. Although his notion is somewhat more conservative than mine--he sees the folk designer as drawing *only* from a limited range of conservative, localized ideas--the terminology and process he describes are nevertheless important to this discussion (1966, 16-22).

Crawlers know and recognize, drivers spend hours planning for, and working on, their vehicles.<sup>2</sup> This process involves manipulating parts culled from a host of sources and utilizing the expertise of equally numerous craftspeople throughout the automotive industry.

The discussion then touches on the implementation of these procedures, which involves making "two major choices in the selection of design" (Pocius, 1979, 274). The first of these is when builders begin their work with tacitly held communal notions regarding vehicle morphology, or form. Often, these notions are so ingrained within the communal ethos that "the designer's normal habit is [considered] mere common sense" (Pye, 1964, 65).

Despite these "restrictions," builders are free to make their secondary choices; moving beyond basic construction assumptions, they use innovative or idiosyncratic means for achieving these modifications. The resulting 4x4s reveal the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of the community and the individualized needs of the builder (Prown: 1982, 1; 1991, 145).<sup>3</sup> Thus, a relatively small inventory of building assumptions produces a wide variety of vehicles (Glassie: 1975, 68). Case studies follow to illustrate different approaches six drivers took to create their rigs. Each study introduces the builder(s), outlines their construction process, and touches upon the impulses leading to the structural changes made to their rig.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on generative building "languages," see: Christopher Alexander.

<sup>3</sup> See also: Edward Sapir, 49.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the impulses leading to object morphologies, see: David Taylor's "What Makes A Good Boat?": Toward Understanding A Model of Traditional Design."

A discussion concerning the process by which these "build-ups" take place follows the case studies. Just as the rigs themselves are a patchwork of parts and modifications, so are their construction processes. Each 4x4 is completed through a host of different stages. These regularly take place in a variety of locations, and through a plethora of people and services.

## VEHICLE CONSTRUCTION AS BRICOLAGE

During the Summer of 1996 I was conducting research in London. While there, I had the opportunity to tour the *Victoria and Albert Museum* with the noted material culture scholar Jeremy Aynsley. As our small group entered a 20th century display, Aynsley commented: "Most people of this age buy things, they don't take time to create them" (6/25/1996). In this consumer age—when nearly any product can be manufactured and sold to a wide market—Rock Crawlers take pride in the fact that they create their own vehicles. In fact, most do not consider a 4x4 theirs unless *they* have built it. Since each rig is a combination of traditional structural motifs and personal gestalts of the topography, buying a pre-modified rock crawler is frowned upon. It is held that such rigs cannot come from the blend of personal knowledge and design negotiation necessary to suit the owner's needs.

The cool response and suspicion many cast upon those who purchase pre-modified rigs was exemplified when an individual attended the 1994 *Jeep Safari* in a pre-modified Jeep that he had purchased from a well known driver. Comments

circulated among many safari participants that this individual was "trying to buy his way into" the community. Some people joked about his inability to properly utilize the rig's abilities off-road.<sup>5</sup> At the 1996 safari I asked a driver from the individual's locale if he had seen this man. He replied, "I haven't seen him in a while. I think he scared himself on a trail." The implication was that the would-be Rock Crawler did not belong on the trail in the first place.

The requisite driver, vehicle, and land dynamic comes when one is aware of each and every aspect of the rig, and how these combine to function in the outback. A driver's "capacity for absorption in [trail driving] hinges on his intimate knowledge of" his 4x4 (Hufford: 1992, 54). This relationship must be built. For this reason, Hummers<sup>6</sup>--now available to the public--are viewed with a mixture of loathing and excitement; loathing: because of their off-the-showroom floor capabilities which require almost no modifications; excitement: because Hummers are so well built that they are capable vehicles right off the showroom floor and require almost no modification (fig: 4.1). Hummers' pre-made attributes, which should estrange the rock crawling community, also intrigue them. Many Rock Crawlers react angrily to the Hummer presence because their drivers do not have to work on the vehicles to make them competent. Yet, these folk are often caught--as on one home video--quietly marvelling over the vehicles' incredible abilities. Of course such comments are infrequently said within ear-shot of most Hummer owners.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on driving and technique, see chapter five.

<sup>6</sup> A 4x4 built by AM General for the U.S. military but now available to the public.



**FIG: 4.1** A Hummer sits in the parking lot to *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*.

Three vehicles at the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* conspicuously articulated the pride owners take in constructing their vehicle. Each had a logo emblazoned on its tailgate: one, a Samurai, sported the caption, "Made in Japan, Built in America." A Jeep CJ-7 displayed a similar phrase: "Real Jeeps aren't Bought, They are Built." Another Jeep exhibited a shortened variation of the second message: "Built Not Bought." These phrases, and others like them,<sup>7</sup> occasionally appear on vehicles, and assert the owner's responsibility for the 4x4s present form. The message is overt: Rock Crawlers take pride that they assemble the vehicles they rely upon.

Rather than being the output of a thoughtless reaction to one's social and regional milieu, rock crawlers result from conscious and well planned design

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<sup>7</sup>A Jeep displaying a similar phrase—"Real Jeeps are built one part at a time"—showed-up at *Mtn. West Off-Road Supply* during the Summer of 1997.



negotiation.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, each completed 4x4 is a “product managed by a [creative] genius” (Henry Glassie, *Fife Conference*, 6/13/1997).<sup>9</sup> This intricate assembly process has been termed “bricolage” by scholars, who note that builders take active roles as “bricoleurs” (Glassie: 1972, 260; Hawkes, 51; Hubka, 429-31; Levi-Strauss, 1966, 16). A bricoleur is like an artist making a collage. The collage progresses as the artist pulls differing images and forms into his/her work, making their multifarious textures integral to the artist’s vision of unified creation. Likewise, the Rock Crawler chooses from among various modification strategies for each aspect of a vehicle’s construction. This pick-and-choose process slowly creates a rig fitting the form of what the competent Rock Crawler—that is one that builds the right rig for the right situation—must include for the trails onto which s/he ventures (Briggs, 3, 6-9; Glassie: 1991, 256-60; Hymes, 32-4).

### RESTRICTED CODES

Part of the vehicle building process entails making choices regarding what must be modified. Such choices are influenced by basic concepts regarding what vehicles “need to have” to work proficiently in the back country. These basics are so ingrained within the group’s world view that they are often “taken for granted”

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<sup>8</sup> Glassie’s “The Variation of Concepts Within Tradition...” reviews numerous examples regarding the morphological choices builders face during the creation of objects. For more on designers and design negotiation, see also: David Pye, 1964, 21.

<sup>9</sup> He continued, noting that each creative act—within a constructive tradition—is “an unfolding of genius.”

(Bernstein, 63; Csikszentmihalyi, 21). This cache of rudimentary morphological assumptions dictating rock crawler forms comprise what are known as the "restricted codes" of vehicle creation (Bernstein, 57).<sup>10</sup> Restricted codes "regulate" (57) vehicle form and are "characterized by a high degree of...predictability" (Upton, 1979, 180). These are the accepted and conservative standards that must be incorporated on a rig for it to be a rock crawler.<sup>11</sup> Such norms form "the weight of...familiar[ity that] continually exerts subtle pressures," and to which the builder conforms as s/he plans and undertakes the construction of a rig (Toelken, 34). Thus, these building tenets are "restricted" in that they control the over-all structure of the rock crawler.

Such building schema "depend upon an assumed body of interests and identifications" (Upton, 1979, 180), and make up the basics of the morphological code. As stated, they account for the "predictability," or the basic structural similarities, between the rigs. Traditional 4x4s incorporate the following changes:

- a suspension lift; taller than stock springs are the basis for this modification
- larger than stock tires; this means that they are both taller and wider
- low gearing
- reliable fuel delivery to the engine
- a "bullet proof," or reliable, drive-train
- roll-over protection for vehicle occupants
- important "extras," which increasing numbers now feel are mandatory: traction aiding devices, lights, winches, ergonomic changes, and body armor

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<sup>10</sup> Restricted and elaborate codes are analogous to the conservative and dynamic forces elaborated upon by Barre Toelken in *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Following Upton, however, I use Bernstein's terms because they directly correlate with a structural approach, and they are more suited to the technicalities of vehicle construction.

<sup>11</sup> Commenting on the effect of creative codes upon traditional object morphologies, Henry Glassie has noted that objects are "formed out of [creators'] wills and managed by tradition" (*Life Conference*, 6/13/1997).

This rudimentary vehicle form has evolved to meet challenges the physical environment places upon the 4x4s. Through years of traversing back country trails, drivers learned that differing aspects of the topography impinge upon vehicles in distinct ways; these building traditions are reactions to those understandings. Such performance enhancing basics have been referred to as "performance correlatives" (Taylor, 1980, 194-7). This delineation marks any "form of the [4x4] which significantly affects its overall functioning" (197). Looking at these "basics" reveals how they affect rock crawler performance in the outback.

### Suspension Lifts

Large rocks, stumps, logs, deep crevices, ruts, and uneven terrain that twists vehicles are common trials on mountain and desert trails (figs: 4.2, 4.3). These situations can force one—and even two—tires into the air. Jagged rocks can rip and gash sheet metal. Employing taller than stock springs lifts the vehicle and allows larger tires; these help raise the rig over trail dangers. This modification also provides the chance to supplement softer riding springs, offering essential extended "spring flex." Flex is a springs' ability to progress through a range of compression and extension. (Pulling a slinky apart and pushing it together provides an idea of flexing springs.) Flex, also known as "travel," is the ability each spring has to allow wheel movement into and over trail irregularities. Stock springs often lack extensive flexing ability; Rock Crawlers devise new suspensions that offer this needed quality.

Rigs that have "lots of travel" keep tires in contact with the ground, thus



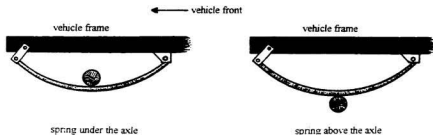
FIG: 4.2 Glenn Wakefield crawls over a boulder-strewn trail in his Samurai. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))



FIG: 4.3 A Samurai gets ready to descend *High Dive* hill, near Moab. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)

continuously maintaining traction. "Suspension travel is paramount for rock crawling. [A] truck doesn't have any traction unless the tires are on the ground—its that simple" (Quinnell, 1997a, 30). A rig that keeps traction is one that can do nearly any trail because it crawls through difficult areas with control. This also means it is a safer 4x4. This is because stiff springs bounce vehicles over and into objects. A vehicle that is bouncing is not in control and could end-up rolling or damaging parts.

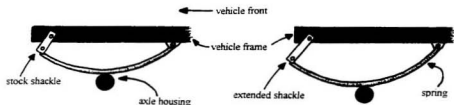
Many Jeep builders are now taking the springs, which are mounted under the axles at the factory, and mounting them over the axles (fig: 4.4). Moving springs over the axle allows builders to raise vehicle height without using a highly arched spring. Traditionally, springs with more arch are used to raise a vehicle, but having



**FIG: 4.4** A "spring-over" conversion takes the spring from under the axle and places it above the axle.

more arch decreases a spring's ability to flex downward. Placing a spring above the axle instantly produces five to six inches of vehicle lift. And flatter springs can then be used to increase downward spring travel. The "spring-over" is quickly becoming a favorite among many hard-core Rock Crawlers because when combined with flat, very soft springs, it produces extreme suspension travel.

Vehicle height is also increased (only) on rear spring type suspensions by the addition of longer shackles (fig: 4.5). Located at one end of the spring and spanning between it and the frame, the shackle is a moveable link that allows the spring to flex. Usually shackles are replaced because the stock units crack under extensive usage in rocky terrain. When more heavy-duty shackles replace the stock units, owners often opt for slightly taller units. These raise vehicle height roughly an inch. Taller shackles also allow slightly more spring flex.



**FIG: 4.5** Using extended spring shackles can give leaf-sprung 4x4s from one to two extra inches of raised height.

The addition of new springs is usually accompanied by new shock absorbers.

Actually the term 'shock absorber' is a misnomer. The real job of absorbing the 'shock' falls to the springs, while the shock absorber is a 'damper'...The shock moves together with the spring's travel, but not so much to absorb the shock as to keep the spring from continuing to oscillate. (Cole, 6)

Proper shocks are as imperative to performance as springs. Considering shocks, drivers usually keep two goals in mind: (1) Street handling and comfort, and (2) off-road handling and comfort. As mentioned, good shocks curb the oscillations of a working spring. As such, "the shock is a cornerstone of the foundation of every off-

road truck;" but there is a fine line between adequate and over-kill (8).

Good shocks let the springs move freely while damping their excess bouncing action. Firm enough valving systems also decrease "body-roll" during cornering at highway speeds. Off-road, shocks must be soft enough to let the springs flex so that in irregular terrain the wheels move smoothly and freely over and around any obstacles. A mis-applied shock will slow down the suspension's ability to react to the terrain. They may even prevent springs from cycling at all. Shocks with little travel, and/or excessively stiff valving,<sup>12</sup> will "hang-up" the springs before they can achieve their full flexing potential. Proper shock application exists on a fine line between good road handling and excellent back country performance.

Many drivers now use multiple-adjust shocks like the *Rancho "9000"* or the *Doetsch Tech "ATA XII"* to give them the best handling characteristics of both worlds. These can be tuned by the turn of a knob on the side of each shock's body. (They can now be tuned by controls placed within the vehicle so that drivers can tune the shocks "on the fly.") The units can be tuned—in less than a minute—to give the exact performance qualities desired for any driving situation.

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<sup>12</sup> Most shocks used off road function by a series of internal valves that regulate the flow of oil within the shock. On-road: very few valves open, producing a firm, controlled ride. Off-road: more valves open, allowing the oil to flow more freely, producing a smooth off-road ride.

## Tires

Like taller suspensions, larger than stock tires are used to keep rock crawlers above trail dangers. The height increase that taller tires afford also keeps vehicles out of deep water when fording streams or rivers. But tires can perform another important function. Like a suspension system with good flex, they help to provide grip. Cole Quinnell notes that "traction and vehicle control are the two primary qualities that separate a great rock crawler from a tow-strap junkie" (1997a, 28). Proper tires are important for maintaining traction, thus ensuring control.

Most off-road tires are considerably wider than stock. The extra width, combined with an array of tread patterns, ensures that vehicles maintain traction as much of the time as possible. No matter how rocky, rutted, or steep a path gets, if traction is maintained, vehicles can continue in a controlled, safe manner.

Tire treads are terrain-specific. Some are designated as "all-terrain." These have mild tread patterns that wear well on the street, provide excellent traction in snow, and adhere well to rocks. They are usually distinguished by a closely interlocking tread design. All-terrain tires work well for drivers who do not frequent hard-core trails and need tires that provide lengthy street wear (fig: 4.6). "Mud" tires feature a more radical design. They do not last as long as all-terrains because of the wide gaps between the big tread "lugs." These big lugs catch on ledges and on the bottom of muddy or wet areas to provide traction. Most hard-core drivers use mud tires because of the superior traction they offer on difficult trails. Except in a few situations, mud tires usually perform better in off-road situations than all-terrains.



Many Rock Crawlers acknowledge this difference in performance by calling all-terrains "highway tires."

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**FIG: 4.6** An all-terrain tire is on the left, while a mud tire is on the right.

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### Low, Low, Low Gearing

Hills of mind boggling steepness, ledges up to five feet in height, and loads of big rocks, these are "hard core" rock crawlers' favorite driving situations. But to competently negotiate these spaces the vehicles must have more than just big tires and abundant wheel travel. They need "steep gearing." Steep gears are the low gear ratios (numerically high: 4.88:1 is lower than 3.50:1) that allow vehicles to slowly crawl over large rocks and up steep hills, without lurches from heavy applications to the gas pedal. This is because

putting on larger tires decreases the power the drivetrain delivers to

the ground, because the engine, T-case, transmission, and differentials have to work harder to turn the larger tire. To make up for this loss of power, the gear ratio of the differentials may need to be increased [lowered]. (DeLong, 1996, 54)

Lower than stock gearing helps provide additional traction by increasing power output, or torque, to the ground—even if larger tires are not being used.

Drivers with low gears don't have to "punch" the gas to get over or through an obstacle. Such tactics can destroy the rig, the terrain, and the driver's reputation.<sup>13</sup> A slow approach, afforded by low gears, maintains control and is less likely to break traction and parts.

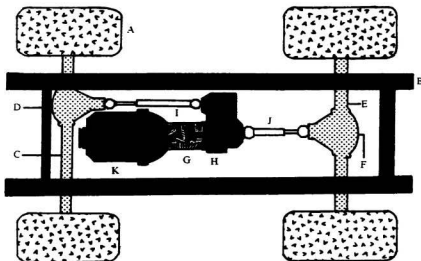
The real key [to tackling rocky and difficult trails] is in proper gearing—particularly with a manual-transmission-equipped truck. The slower you creep along a trail, the more precise control you have of your vehicle. This is why four- and five-speed manual trannies [transmissions] with 6:1 first-gear ratios are the rage, as are 4:1 transfer-case conversions and super steep axle gears. (Quinnell, 1997a, 30)

Low gearing resulting from these modifications also helps when driving down steep inclines. Sometimes an incline is so great that if brakes are used a 4x4's back tires may come off the ground. Low gearing provides the vehicle with "hold-back;" this is the ability to slow a vehicle using gearing rather than brakes. (Think of driving 30mph in first gear. The drastic, lurching, slowing that happens when you abruptly let off the gas is caused by hold-back.) Some vehicles have gearing so steep that their drivers have to use the gas pedal to drive down hills. On the *Lion's Back*, a steep and treacherous obstacle in Moab, many vehicles only use gearing to slow their progress down the hill. "Riding" the brakes could wear them out, or warp them

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<sup>13</sup> See chapters five and six for discussions concerning acceptable driving habits.

### DRIVE-TRAIN OF STANDARD 4-WHEEL DRIVE



- |                      |                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| A: Tire              | B: Frame                   |
| C: Front axle        | D: Front axle differential |
| E: Rear axle         | F: Rear axle differential  |
| G: Transmission      | H: Transfer case           |
| I: Front drive shaft | J: Rear drive shaft        |
| K: Engine            |                            |

**FIG: 4.7**

from the heat generated.

Low gearing can be accomplished by replacing gears in the axle differentials (fig: 4.7). Another way to drop the gear ratio is using a transmission or transfer case<sup>\*14</sup> with low gears (fig: 4.7). A newly evolving technology entails replacing the stock gears in some transmissions or transfer cases with lower aftermarket sets. For instance: I replaced the gear-set in my stock Ford "C-4" automatic transmission

<sup>14</sup> The transfer case is responsible for lowering the gear ratio for 4-wheel drive and splitting the power between the front and rear axles.

with a set normally used in drag racing. This provided me with an 18% lower than stock first gear; second gear is 12% lower than stock. Third gear remains stock for comfortable highway driving. Transfer case kits are used to drop gearing more drastically. One of these is available for Samurais; it drops the 4-wheel drive low gearing by 112%! A new gear-set was recently developed to drop Jeep Wrangler and Cherokee transfer case gearing by 50%. And a transfer case kit for Toyotas has an incredible 106% drop. These kits make it possible to build vehicles boasting 4-wheel drive ratios as low as 200:1, a feat thought impossible in the late 1980s.

### Reliable Fuel Delivery

Extreme terrain is filled with excessively steep climbs, inching over and between objects, moving along trails that seem like mere footpaths along cliffs, and crawling across bad side angles known as "off-cambers." In such situations it is imperative that engines run smoothly and reliably. If an engine quits, more than a paint-job may be at stake—lives could be in danger. While most drivers don't think of the death extreme, they do seek engines that provide reliable power.

Carburetors are often the subject of modifications designed to prevent them from failing to supply the engine with gasoline while bouncing over rugged terrain. Some makes—which are favored on hot rods and race cars—are problematical off-road. A few carburetor brands, however, are better at avoiding trail-induced fuel starvation than others. Special modifications—many of which come from off-road

racing<sup>15</sup>—also help carbs to deliver fuel smoothly to the engine. Many people with carburetted rigs, however, have found that the best way to ensure reliable fuel delivery is to use a fuel regulator. These units are installed along the fuel line (between the gas tank and the carb) and only allow enough gas into the carb to be used by the engine. Fuel regulators don't give the carb enough gas to allow it to slosh out of the bowls while going over rocky terrain, or to spill out while inching up and down steep inclines. Fuel regulators frequently have the added benefit of providing enhanced gas mileage.

Matt Smith was having trouble with his Jeep's engine "dying" while attempting steep climbs. After one extremely frustrating trip he installed a fuel regulator; he reported that it "completely stopped my problem." I was so impressed with his claims that I purchased one for my Bronco. Before installing the fuel regulator, one rough trail had caused my engine to die more than 60 times in a four hour period. (It was so frustrating that I started to count the number of times my motor died.) After the installation, it only died three times during an entire day on the same trail.

To avoid the carburetion hassle, many drivers replace their stock carburetion/engine systems with fuel injected motors. "Injected motors" always supply a perfect amount of gas to the engine—sometimes even if the rig is upside down. Additionally, throttle response, or the immediacy and sensitivity of engine reaction to input from the gas pedal, is unbeatable with these systems. This means heightened control. Added to the control dimension is the fact that high altitudes do

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<sup>15</sup> A different 4-wheel drive community.

not adversely affect injected motors. The thin air at high altitudes renders carburetted motors sluggish—throttle response is unpredictable. With injected motors, elevation makes little difference; drivers frequenting a range of altitudes favor the units for this benefit.

Many Jeep owners, like Charlie Copsey and Chris Stephens, use fuel injected motors from Corvettes. Trans-Ams, and full-sized Chevrolet pick-up trucks also regularly supply fuel injected engines for Jeeps or Land Cruisers. Owners of older-style "vintage" Ford Broncos, like Shannon Shirk, use injected units from Mustangs. Full-sized Ford pick-up trucks also occasionally supply them. The reason for these specific choices is ease of installation or compatibility of parts.

### Bullet-Proof Drive Train

Having a "bullet-proof" rig refers to the vehicle's ability to resist breaking-down while enduring off-road extremes. The term bullet-proof, then, is used to connote a rig's indestructible nature. And a rig's drive train is the chain-like combination of engine-transmission-transfer case-drive shafts-and axles (fig: 4.7). Basically it forms the route through which a vehicle's power flows from the engine to the ground. Having a bullet-proof drive train, then, is more complex than merely incorporating one part or one modification into one's rig. It entails building the entire engine-to-axles system with parts that are known—via personal experience or traditionally held wisdom—to be strong and reliable under heavy-duty usage.

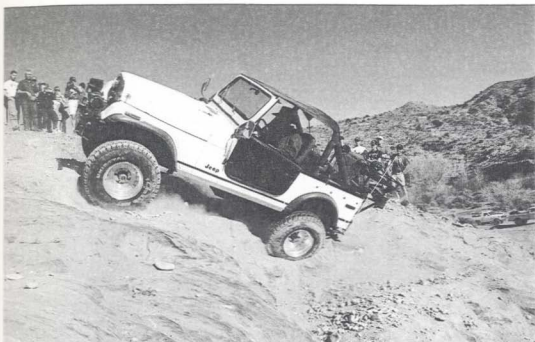
Transmissions, axles, engines, transfer cases, builders constantly replace or

rebuild these parts. As soon as one part is "beefed-up" it shifts the stresses of tough driving along to the next weakest part. Builders must carefully consider the strength of each part in the chain so as not to put too much pressure on one single link. When this occurs, that one link is likely to snap while off-road. And, of course, as Murphy's Law holds, it will always be as far from a town as possible.

To ensure a bullet-proof drive train, builders incorporate parts from a host of sources. Shannon Shirk utilized parts from many rigs on his 1968 Ford Bronco. The fuel injected engine came from a late model Ford Mustang; power flows from it through an automatic transmission that was borrowed from a newer model year Bronco. The transfer case came from yet another model year Bronco. The axles under Shannon's rig were built using a host of parts from multiple vehicle manufacturers including, Ford, Chevrolet, and International Harvester. The resulting patchwork of parts forms a system that he feels is reliable in nearly any situation.

### Roll-Over Protection

All off-road rigs must have some form of roll-over protection. "Rolling" is not something Rock Crawlers plan to do, but when driving in radical environments precautions must be taken: "It may not be realistic to expect most sport-ute owners to put a big piece of ugly black pipe inside their expensive rigs, but if you're going to be climbing a lot of hills, you'd better do it anyway" (DeLong, 1996, 47). Vehicles with "roofs" (non-removable tops) don't present a problem to passenger safety because their factory tops provide protection. Open-air rigs—those with removable



**FIG: 4.8** A Jeep climbing *Potato Salad Hill* loses traction and begins to roll. Notice that it only has a roll bar (no cage kit) and because of this the windshield folds over as it rolls down the hill. (Courtesy Mark Milner)



**FIG: 4.9** (Courtesy Mark Milner)





FIG: 4.10 (Courtesy Mark Milner)



FIG: 4.11 (Courtesy Mark Milner)



**FIG: 4.12** As can be seen here, the roll bar has not folded over; but there is no cage kit to protect the front of the Jeep's cab section. The windshield has folded-in towards the driver. (Courtesy Mark Milner)



**FIG: 4.13** Luckily, the Jeep stops rolling, instead of continuing into the wash below. As bad as this looks, the passengers walked away unhurt, thanks to the protection offered by the roll bar. (Courtesy Mark Milner)

tops—do present problems to passenger safety. Thus, protection must come in the form of a roll bar. A roll-bar is a large tubular hoop arching over the passengers at windshield level (figs: 4.8-4.13). It is usually mounted in the vicinity of the rear wheel wells inside the vehicle. Some extra-strong units go through the body and mount directly to the vehicle's frame.

Roll-bars provide a moderate degree of protection, but in the event of a bad roll, or a roll in extremely arduous terrain they may fold. To avoid this, many Rock Crawlers add a roll-cage to the roll-bar. A roll-cage is welded to the roll bar and passes over the occupants. A second hoop is placed directly behind the front windshield. The "cage kit" fully encircles the occupants, keeping them safe.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1994 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* Chris Stephens lead the *Hell's Revenge* trail. As vehicles attempted to climb a formidable obstacle known as *Potato Salad Hill*, he spotted a topless vintage Bronco with no roll-bar or roll cage and was aghast that "anyone could be *that* stupid." Chris immediately informed the owner that he was not allowed to continue on the trail ride without a roll-bar. Two years later he was still unable to believe that a person would drive without any roll-over protection, and recalled the *Hell's Revenge* incident as "one of the dumbest things I've ever seen."

The *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* proudly assert that thanks to rollbar/roll cage protection, no one on an officially sanctioned *Easter Jeep Safari* trail ride has ever been killed. People do, however, occasionally get into situations where such

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<sup>16</sup> A roll-cage saved my life when I rolled my 1968 Bronco during a freeway accident in 1989.

protection is not enough. Deaths do rarely occur, but due to the infrequency of such accidents, none of my informants have been present when an trail disaster lead to a death. Rumors do occasionally circulate about such accidents, and one garage in Moab--with a specially constructed tow/retrieval vehicle--has a wall devoted to photos of accidents that have occurred on Moab area trails. Many of the wrecks depicted on this wall resulted in deaths.

### Important "Extras"

Although there is constant debate among builders about whether the following modifications are "required," they do not always fall into the changes necessary for a rig to be regarded as competent. However, they do regularly appear on rock crawlers that frequent arduous terrain. Builders routinely modify, add, or replace: body armor, winches, lighting, and axle differentials.

Body armor comprises a host of protective bolt-ons owners can add to a rig to safeguard it against rock damage. Favorite armor among many are "nerf bars." Nerf bars are thick steel tubes that extend out from the frame between the tires and directly below the rocker panel (fig: 4.14). These tubes protect the bottom of the rig from rock damage. After the front tire moves over a rock or log, the area on the vehicle body just behind the tire is prone to coming down hard on that object. With nerf bars, instead of causing body damage, the object strikes the nerf bar and then slides, or "nerfs," along it rather than the body. Cole Quinnell advises: "You can protect the rocker panels on your...truck from damage with nerf bars. They



FIG: 4.14 Nerf bars under the body protect the rocker panels of the Neilsen's Jeep. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

decrease your clearance, but the thousands of dollars worth of body damage they save is worth it" (1997a, 30).

Bumpers are also modified or replaced. The object is to provide strength and protection while also increasing approach and departure angles. Approach and departure angles are the amount of **overhang\*** extending off the ends of a vehicle past the tires (fig: 4.15).<sup>17</sup> Large overhangs scrape on objects. This can damage both terrain and vehicle. Additionally, it is not uncommon for a rig with significant overhang to get caught because the bumpers have wedged onto something (fig: 4.16). Placing bumpers as tight to the front and rear of the rig as possible is

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<sup>17</sup> Increasing approach and departure angles is another reason for lifting the height of a rock crawler.

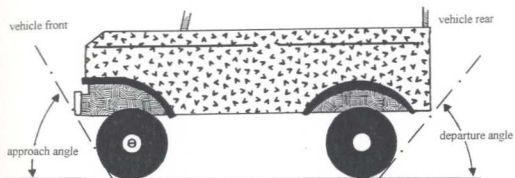


FIG: 4.15 Approach and departure angles.



FIG: 4.16 A Bronco catches its rear bumper on the rock of *Frenchie's Fin* as it tries to climb a hill on *Fins 'N' Things* trail. The bumper wedged so tightly that the tires could not obtain enough traction to pull it free. Other participants had to work together to dislodge it.

advisable. Leaving as much tire openly exposed as possible at the front of the rig is also a bonus--this leaves space to approach large rocks with the path to the tire unobstructed.

Powerful lighting is a must for night driving, and stock headlights are simply not strong enough to do the job. The reason stock headlights fail is because they are not bright enough, thus throwing shadows across the trail. Dangerous irregularities in the terrain hide within shadows cast by boulders or ruts. Drivers not seeing these lurking dangers could navigate their rig directly into (or onto) one. Brilliant aftermarket off-road lights flood the terrain with illumination, obliterating the possibility of danger lurking within a shadow. These lights can be placed on top of the rig, but tree branches often rip them off. Many serious drivers place them on the bumper or the pillars at the windshield sides. Some use another option, more powerful off-road headlights. Stock units are 45 watts on low and 60 watts on high. Several companies now produce race headlights that "crank" 80 watts on low and 100 watts on high. One company even makes a headlight that produces 90 watt lows and 130 watt high beams. These stronger headlights are exceptional for night time off-road use.

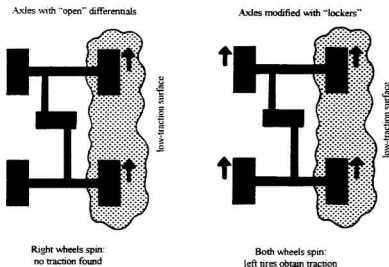
Winches are an option for some and a necessity for others. This depends upon the trails one frequents. New trails are becoming increasingly difficult and mandate the presence of winches: "There's nothing like a winch to pull you out of a stuck situation. It should be one of the first add-ons you buy" (DeLong, 1996, 49). The *Sledgehammer* trail is so boulder-strewn that vehicles without winches might get impossibly wedged between the rocks in many locations. In fact this has occurred

to some drivers within twenty feet of the trail's head! The *Surprise Canyon* trail has waterfalls in excess of fifteen feet tall which must be climbed. Without a winch this trail would be equally impenetrable. Usually they are placed on top of the front bumper (figs: 3.5, 3.7, 3.18, 3.26), but drivers now use them on the backs of their rigs too.

Locking axle differentials are the premier "extra" that one can add to a rig. In fact, many, like Chris Stephens, feel that a vehicle must have them to be competently built. Chris has repeatedly stated that "locking diffs" are the most important modification a driver can make to a rig. Also known as "lockers," they are the ultimate in providing traction for extreme driving. Lockers are devices that replace stock axle differentiation units to negate much of their differentiation. This means both wheels on a locker-equipped axle nearly always turn in tandem.

With a locker-equipped axle on twisted, broken, and rocky terrain, where wheels regularly lift off the ground--no matter how good wheel travel is--traction is constantly maintained. This does not occur with stock "open" differentials, which always route power to the wheel with the least traction. Consequently, when rigs with stock axles get "in a bind," lifting a tire high off the ground, the open axle will send power to the tire languishing in the air rather than the one planted on the trail. By comparison, a "locked" axle routes power to the wheel on the ground and the one in the air. "To send maximum power to your wheels, you need to prevent the unloaded wheel from spinning, and the way you do this is to lock the open differential" (DeLong, 1996, 51). With power to the ground, the "locked-up" rig will pull itself through the difficult area, while an "open" rig will not (fig: 4.17). Having a





**FIG: 4.17** Performance differences between locking differentials and stock "open" differentials.

"locking differential and a strong axle assembly [are considered by many to be] crucial" (Quinnell, 1997a, 30).

This conservative body of ideas and concepts concerning vehicles and their overall form is the source for rock crawler building traditions (Jones: 1989, 236-45, 250). Such concepts are so ingrained within the ethos of the community that they seem to members like self-evident truths (Herman, 1984, 68-9). These "truths" constitute "an adherence to a traditional base concept—a specific structure of components—and an employment of a traditional set of rules that prescribe a range of additive and subtractive variation" (Glassie: 1974, 231). The tradition, and hence the range of these personal approaches, is always in transition. For instance, as late

as 1993 most serious Rock Crawlers eschewed tires taller than 35 inches in height. In fact, most rigs sported 33" tall tires. It was commonly felt that tires greater than 35 inches lifted vehicles too tall to effectively perform in many off-road contexts due to the 4x4's resulting higher center of gravity.

However, at the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* an inordinate number of vehicles with tires 36 and even 38 inches in height were being used (fig: 4.18). Although most vehicles still ride on 33 inch tall tires, larger sizes are now accepted and are regularly utilized due to new suspension and body modifications—not to mention pressures placed on drivers by increasingly difficult trails. Despite rock crawlers being traditional creations, their "continuity" does not generate a stagnant pattern (Griffith, 165). Traditional vehicle forms, as noted, are in constant flux. Malleability inherent to the build-up tradition results from the demands placed on rigs



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FIG: 4.18 From left to right: 31" tire, 33" tire, 35" tire, 36" tire, and a 38" tire stands next to Quinn Mortensen.

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and drivers by new and more difficult contemporary trails, the availability of updated technologies, and personal innovation.

### ELABORATED CODES

There is tremendous variation in the configuration of 4x4s. This lack of static forms within the corpus of vehicles is due to what are known as *Elaborated codes* (Bernstein, 62). Elaborated codes are "characterized by low...predictability" (Upton, 1979, 180). Essentially, this aspect of the building process is where builders "elaborate" on the conservative assumptions from which they work. They choose "from many...alterations which allow [them] to express [their] experience in a particularized, differentiating manner" (180).<sup>18</sup> Simply stated, once individuals decide to build a rig and tacitly assume the restricted codes (suspension, tire size, gearing changes, etc...), they are then free to decide how these codes can be implemented (Bernstein, 62; Jones, 1989, 126-31; Taft, 112, 127). Beginning with these basic tenets, builders have a plethora of choices from which to choose.

The range and combination of elaborated codes brought together in one vehicle is what makes it distinctive and personal (as well as a discourse on the type of terrain the driver frequents). Thus, tradition neither implies stagnance nor

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<sup>18</sup> Concerning this dynamic, David Pye has noted: "Free workmanship shows that, while design is a matter of imposing order on things, the intended results of design can often be achieved perfectly well without the workman being denied spontaneity and unstudied improvisation" (1968, 71).

archaism.<sup>19</sup> Some drivers may opt for taller suspension lifts to fit larger tires. Others may use a "shorter" lift and cut their vehicles' wheel wells--the sheet metal around the wheels--to make room for larger tires. Many drivers opt for suspension "packages" produced by companies like *Rancho*, *Superlift*, *Trail Master*, *Teraflex*, *Wild Horses*, and others, as the basis for a new suspension. Currently, complex modifications using stock springs also provide excellent off-road handling benefits.

Many drivers achieve low gear ratios by using very low gearing in their "pumpkins" (axle differentials). Others, wishing to spread the strain of lower gears<sup>20</sup> throughout the drive train, also lower gearing in the transmission or even the transfer case. Some people simply use a stock roll-bar for occupant safety, while others weld complex roll-cages--which come in kits or can be custom-built--into their rigs.

The point is, basic concepts controlling rudimentary vehicle form (restricted codes) are only the beginnings of vehicle modification. Individual creativity and expertise is evinced through "play" with the possibilities presented by the elaborated codes, or the range of approaches possible to solve each morphological problem besetting builders (Borland & Livesay, 40; Briggs, 7; Hubka, 431). Henry Glassie's discussion of architectural variation among English and German house types touches upon the process of combining culturally transmitted concepts about space to produce new house forms. This description could easily describe vehicle builders:

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<sup>19</sup> Hubka's article "Just Folks Designing..." refutes the idea that traditional building methods emasculate the artist.

<sup>20</sup> Lower gearing is smaller in size, lessening its relative strength. By using gears which are not as low in many drivetrain locations--instead of very low gearing in just one place--the over-all strength of one's drivetrain is retained.

[Each rig] is an inventory of learned concepts. The [creation] process consists of selecting from among...concepts, some of them new, some of them old...Some concepts are fully accepted, some are modified, some are torn apart and combined with others, and some are rejected. (1986, 411-12)

For Rock Crawlers, the breaking apart, combination, and modification of construction techniques is initiated by asking questions such as: How high should the suspension be lifted? How should the lift be accomplished? Should the tires be 33 inches tall, 35 inches, or bigger? The range and variety of modification choices are limited only by one's imagination or wallet.

Following is a discussion of six rock crawlers, and the process by which each arrived at its form. Only general modifications are outlined because a full description of any one vehicle would require readers to have an extensive automotive background. Additionally, each rig would require its own lengthy chapter. For a graphic depiction of the desired outcome for each vehicle modification see the performance correlatives table included at the end of each vehicle discussion. By locating the 4x4's performance correlatives (ie: suspension, tires, or gearing) on the chart, readers can compare choices made by the builders. The differing selections made by builders for each correlative hint at the range of modifications possible.

Photos depict each Jeep's different stance, and structural differences. Several drivers even took me to photo locations that would "show off what [their] rig can do." Jim Broadbent produced an itemized list of future modifications, which is included. The list was already in existence at the time of our interview; copies were merely made available to me. The existence of this list—whether readers understand its specific lexicon or not—attests to the continually fluctuating rock crawler form.

The rigs rarely keep a single morphology for extended periods. Drivers constantly reconfigure them in an unending quest to bring their form into harmony with the requirements placed upon them by the outback. In fact, the following vehicles will not be recognizable as the same units appearing in the photos by the time this dissertation is defended.

Each rig is captured here in one phase of a continuous process. Jim Broadbent's and Charlie Copsey's vehicles underwent major suspension changes just months after my interviews and photo shoots. Matt Smith's Jeep now has a brilliant-white fiberglass body; this replaces the rust scarred one he had at the time of the photo shoot. Focusing on "the mechanicals," Matt told me the body was his "last priority;" but when the mechanical changes to his 4x4 were "nearly finished" a car slammed into his driver's side one morning as he drove to work. Matt took this "opportunity" to replace the Jeep's body with a rust-proof fiberglass unit. In 1997, Ed Isaacson re-painted his Jeep, changing the steel-grey paint seen in the following photos to teal-green. He also added a two inch **body lift**\* to provide more room for his tires. In January, 1997, Victor Mokler discussed a list of changes that he made to his rig since we met during the *Jeep Safari* in 1996. One of these changes was a new motor. Initially, my impulse was include the most recent information on each 4x4. Then I realized that this quest alone is worthy of a thesis.

I have limited this discussion to Jeeps. By confining the review to Jeep vehicles, I can focus upon the actual morphology of the rigs rather than becoming mired in explications concerning the differing suspension designs between various

vehicle manufacturers. This strategy has benefits and drawbacks. The benefits are that readers will easily see the similarities and differences between the building strategies of the various individuals. A sense of continuity is thus created through listing a series of analogous rigs. The drawback is that without seeing the full range of vehicles, and their attending modification strategies, readers may regard the small selection below—and hence all rock crawlers—as a group of nearly identical vehicles. This they definitely are not.

Each vehicle manufacturer generates schools of thought. For instance, modified Jeeps often sport desirable *Dana* "300" transfer cases. This is because they came stock in Jeeps for several years; they are transplanted with relative ease into Jeeps that did not come with one. However, vintage Ford Broncos—like Shannon Shirk's—are rarely found with *Dana* "300" transfer cases because the extensive modifications required for installation are not worth the benefits the unit provides. Instead, Bronco owners opt for a different "t-case" that suits their needs and is relatively easy to install. This transfer case, not coincidentally, is rarely found in Jeep vehicles.

While reading about the following Jeeps, keep in mind that the smallest morphological differences produce rigs that not only differ visually, but handle in radically diverse fashions. An inch of suspension travel or height can make the difference between a vehicle that finishes a trail and one that does not. Each driver below uses parts he believes to be reliable. The different aspects of each vehicle have been orchestrated to form a whole that functions as a single unit. Each Jeep represents a well crafted vehicle; some are built for tougher trail action than others,

but all suit their owners, who know the landscape into which they venture.

### Jim & Justin Broadbent's 1987 Jeep Wrangler

Jim and his son, Justin, like driving extreme trails,<sup>21</sup> therefore their rig is modified to perform well on any difficulties they encounter. To accomplish this task they drive a 1987 Jeep Wrangler. Jim chose the Wrangler because its size "allows it to get into tight spots easily." Smaller vehicle sizes usually provide more maneuverability. Besides, a bigger vehicle was not needed for the two of them. (They are now building a larger Jeep Scrambler to provide room for full-family trips.)

The suspension was one of the first aspects of the vehicle to be modified. Jim has had at least three different systems on the Wrangler. One spring set-up gave all the flex he needed off-road, but it was so soft that Jim was "scared [he] would roll [the vehicle] on steep hills." The system they now use is what they want and is comprised of soft one inch lift *Rancho Suspension* springs mounted over the axle. This gives the Jeep approximately six inches of highly flexible, yet controlled, suspension lift.

One inch lift shackles were used to mount the springs to the frame. The spring-over operation provided approximately six or seven inches of lift; this affords

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<sup>21</sup> Trail difficulty is rated by the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* on a 1 to 4+ scale (1, 2, 3, 3+, 4, 4+). A 1 level trail is no more than a dirt road, while a 4 is much like that described at the opening of this chapter. A 3 or 3+ rated trail is very difficult but can be managed by a moderately built rig. In Moab, some trails are rated 4+ and have five foot ledges that must be climbed or dropped off. Such trails can only be completed by the best drivers who drive the most highly modified vehicles.



ample room for the extensive wheel travel which the set-up provides. It also provides clearance so the body will not get rock-damaged on tough trails. The suspension is damped with adjustable *Rancho "9000"* shocks to provide a ride that can be tuned to suit any terrain. The suspension combination provides so much wheel travel in the rear that the gas tank had to be altered to allow the axle's full range of movement without making contact and ripping a hole in it. This suspension lift has been combined with a one inch body-lift. Body lifts are another way of raising the body height from the ground. This is accomplished by placing a spacer between the frame and body. The body and suspension lifts provide enough room for 35 inch tall and 12.5 inch wide *Kelly "Mud Terrain"* tires (33 inch *BFGoodrich "All-Terrain"* tires are used for daily driving on the street).

To keep gearing low with the 35 inch tall tires, the Broadbents opted to replace the Jeep's stock 3.54:1 axle gears with 4.56:1 sets. This extremely low ratio provides more than enough power in any situation. But gearing is not enough for the type of 4-wheeling they do, they also needed strength. So instead of merely replacing the gears in the stock axles, the Broadbents replaced both axles with units from heavier trucks. The front is now a *Dana "44"*, which was taken from a half-ton Ford pick-up truck; the rear axle is a *reverse cut" Dana "60"* which was taken from the back of a 3/4 ton Chevy pick-up truck. These axles provide strength in situations that would destroy stock Wrangler axles.

This strength means safety and security in dangerous locations on trails far from town. While the new axles were being built, Jim and Justin had another major

modification installed: lockers. Both axles contain ARB "Air Lockers." These units give drivers the ability to fully override the differentiation in the axle, providing traction to both wheels on each axle, by merely pushing a button. This modification means that all tires continually pull the vehicle, even if one (or even two) tires is in the air. The Broadbents knew that for the type of trails they frequent stock "open" differentials could never provide the continual traction they need.

The axles boast another major modification: a custom four-wheel disc brake system. They were installed to help the Wrangler maintain control through deep water crossings like those on *Fordyce Creek* (F map 1), one of Jim's favorite trails. Rivers get the stock rear drum brakes wet, rendering them useless. The brakes were also installed with the steep inclines of Moab, Utah, in mind. Drum brakes heat up under constant usage; disc brakes stay much cooler. Cool brakes are effective brakes. The rear drums on the Broadbents' Jeep were replaced with discs taken from a Cadillac. The front axle's stock discs were replaced with a set from a 3/4 ton GMC pick up truck. Both sets are the largest that could be found and provide reliable "stop on a dime" braking.

The transfer case of their Jeep was also chosen with off-road usage in mind. It is a *Dana "300"* unit taken from an earlier model Jeep CJ. The new "t-case" was used instead of the stock Wrangler unit because of its increased strength; it also offered modification options not available for the stock t-case at the time of the modification. The Broadbents felt its versatility and increased strength made it a logical choice. This new unit was then mated to a *New Venture "4500"* manual

transmission. The new transmission was taken from a 3/4 ton Chevy pick up. It seemed a logical choice for the Broadbents for two major reasons: (1) It is an extremely heavy-duty transmission that is not likely to break under rock crawling extremes, and (2) because of its low 6.5:1 "granny low"<sup>22</sup> first gear. Such incredibly low gearing, when combined with the axle gears, creates a rock crawler capable of inching over or through anything without hardly a touch to the gas pedal. Such smooth transfer of power is something to be envied in tough terrain. Extremely low gearing also means the Wrangler has great "hold-back" on steep Moab trail descents.

The engine is currently the stock Jeep Wrangler "256" straight 6 cylinder. Although Jim is planning on replacing it with a Corvette "L-98" fuel-injected motor, he has been relatively pleased with the stock unit. This does not mean, however, that it is in its stock form. It was "tweaked" to provide "a few extra horse-power" with additions such as a header/after-market carburetor/air filter combination. This allows more air to flow through the engine, providing increased horse-power, quicker throttle response, and reliable performance off-road.

The Broadbents use the stock roll-bar to protect the rig's occupants. And to make the Wrangler self-sufficient, they added many other modifications. One of the best is the *Link Arc* welding system mounted under the hood. This system, running

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<sup>22</sup> "Granny low" is a term used by Rock Crawlers to denote extremely low gearing. Such a first gear is actually too low to be used on the street and is skipped during the normal progression of shifting. But during rock crawling this gear provides an extremely slow and controlled movement through difficult terrain. It eliminates the need for harsh or quick bursts of speed which could lurch the rig into a trouble situation.

off the Wrangler's power-booster electrical system, allows them to weld broken parts back together on the trail. Such systems save hours of walking or towing to get the rig to a shop. Instead, broken axles, the frame, bumpers, etc...can be mended right on the trail. Other drivers who break parts can also benefit from Jim's system.

"Nerf bars" have been installed to protect the Jeep from jagged rocks. In some cases—like on *Sledgehammer* trail—Jim uses the nerf bars to slide along large rocks that would rip his rocker panels. The 9000 pound winch on the front of the Jeep also helps get the rig out of off-road binds. In fact, trails such as *Surprise Canyon*, *Jackhammer*, and *Sledgehammer* cannot be run without the aid of a good winch. The Jeep also sports a set of *Dick Cepek* off-road lights for plenty of illumination on rides lasting into the night. For future modifications, see Jim's list of planned changes (figs: 4.21a, 4.21b).

Jim frequents some of the most extreme and difficult trails in the western states. His jeep has been modified so as to perform well in any of these situations. Between the Summer of 1996, when Jim was interviewed, and the Summer of 1997, when this chapter was written, Jim has fully changed his suspension two or three times. After learning that "the new suspension did well on rocks, like in Dakota—but did not do well on the steep climbs like at Moab" (8/5/1997)—Jim changed his suspension back to a relatively conservative four inch tall spring under-axle design. Returning from the 1997 *Dakota Challenge* he reported that his articulation was not as extensive as it had been with his most radical suspension, but that he frequented

Moab the most, "so it should be set-up to perform best there" (8/5/1997).

Jim has tried many set-ups on his rig. Each one has played with construction rules to achieve the benefits he has felt to be important on the trail. After going from mild to wild, he is back to using the best form for the terrain he frequents the most. Jim adds, "it did well [in Dakota] this year. I only had a fuel pump go out on me there...and we fixed that on the trail" (8/5/1997).



FIG: 4.19 The Broadbents' Jeep sits in the desert. (Courtesy of Jim Broadbent)



FIG: 4.20 Justin shows off the Wrangler's extensive front wheel travel. Notice the winch and nerf bars.

**Wrangler Decisions after Safari 4- 6-96**

1. Reposition front brake lines
2. Fabricate or buy and install heavy duty front shock mounts
  - a. repair shock right front
3. Emergency brake cable install (ordered Six States)
4. Jamboree Rack mounts install on tire carrier
5. Oil leak rear differential
6. HPC front and rear differential covers
7. Suspect power steering pump may be going out
8. Left front Super Winch hub / ARB is not working
9. Cap ends of nerf bars
10. Rancho gauge doesn't light up
11. Install Ready Air and Tank (*have*) with air hose Quick connect
12. Roll Bar
  - a. cosmetic Wrangler style with seat belts and bar pad/covers
  - b. Maintain sound bar; soft top; and hard top features
  - c. interior lighting on front roll bar
13. Carburetor
  - a. runs black smoke
  - b. sometimes diesels
  - c. kills on steep vertical
  - d. Jack has other jets
14. Gas tank will fill to full only if take time ...tank acts like an air pocket inside ...air vent blockage like before?
15. Remove and sale AMC 258 cc 4.2 L 6 cylinder engine etc. \*\*\*
16. Remove and sale Center Force clutch, adapter, and NV 4500 transmission \*\*\*
17. Install L-98 engine / harness / Camaro radiator (*have*)
  - a. steel or steel braided hoses
  - b. sensors
  - c. gauges
18. Install 700R4 Corvette transmission / harness (*have*)
  - a. LOKAR shifter and dash light indicator
19. Fuel pressure pump and gauge (*have*)
20. Dual exhaust
21. Drive shafts
  - a. balanced
  - b. new heavy duty cv - Tom Woods \*\*\*
22. Axle Perch / Differential angle correction \*\*\*
23. Steering castor / toe-in and steering wheel alignment
24. I want anti-sway bar for highway / JKS Quick disconnect
25. Half-doors

FIG: 4.21a Jim's planned modifications. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

- a. Best top upper half gutter style
- 26. Cosmetic things for Wrangler
  - a. floor board
  - b. carpet
- 27. Other items to buy and install (JMB):
  - 1. Mepco Steel Horse Super seats (other?)
  - 2. Master Rack dash rack
  - 3. Tuffy console
  - 4. Confer trunk or Delta box
  - 5. Confer under seat box
  - 6. Mepco speaker boxes (?)
  - 7. CB
    - a. (Jacobs/ Wrangler Products wire assembly)
    - B. amplifier
    - 8. velcro grab handles
    - 9. rewire driving lights heavier wire
    - 10. rear back-up light
    - 11. car phone console/ parts
- 30. Parts to return to Mt. West: (Justin)
  - a. Scrambler top
  - b. body lift kit
  - c. exchange Safari cover for rail gutter type
- 28. Spare Parts:
  - 1. front drive shaft \*\*\*
  - 2. rear drive shaft \*\*\*
  - 3. U joints front
  - 4. U joints rear
  - 5. U joints straps
  - 6. ARB valves
  - 7. ARB control switch
  - 8. Right front axle and knuckle / U joint
  - 9. Left front axle and knuckle / U joint
- 28. Wrangler / Scrambler - fit Wrangler top if; not possible buy the CJ 7 hard top and doors at this time \*\*\* use money from sale of Scrambler hardtop \$1000 - \$1200; doors \$300; Wrangler engine assembly \$1100 -1300; NV 4500 and Center Force clutch and Advanced Adapter plate \$2000-\$2200; approximately \$4000.- \$4500.; use parts money for Wrangler conversion (labor and miscellaneous parts) and remainder toward Scrambler
- 29. Follow-up sale:
  - a. Scrambler fenders etc. -Gary
  - b. 454 Wiring harness -Dave
  - c. 454 TBI -Dave

FIG: 4.21b Jim's planned modifications continued. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



# Dr. Jim Broadbent's 1987 Jeep Wrangler

Vehicle Modifications		Performance Correlatives										
		Character	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Bullet Proof Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Rock Protection	Lighting	Extraction Help
Tires	33" "Kelly" DTR	••	••		••	••						
	Front Axle					••						
	Rear Axle					••						
	Axle Gears				••		••					
	4.56:1											
	"ARB" Air Locker				••	••						
	Front Locker				••	••						
	Rear Locker				••	••	••					
	Transmission				••	••						
	"New Venture" 4500					••	••					
Transfer Case	"Dana" 300				••	••						
	Front Delivery					••		••				
	"Weber" 4.0nh					••						
	Engine					••		••				
	Shock 258 6 cyl											
	Springs	••	••	••	••							
	"Rancher" 1.0" Spc Over Axle											
	Front Shocks	••	••	••	••							
	Rear Shocks	••	••	••	••							
	Shocks			••	••					••		
Roll Over	"Rancher" 9000											
	Stock								••			
	Roll Over											
	None											
EXTRA ADDITIONS												
Winch	"Warn" 9000										••	
Light	"Thick Capped" Floods										••	
Body Lift	Custom 1.0"	••	••									
BODY ARMOR												
	Steel Flats									••		
	"Tonker"									••		
Rear Hammer												

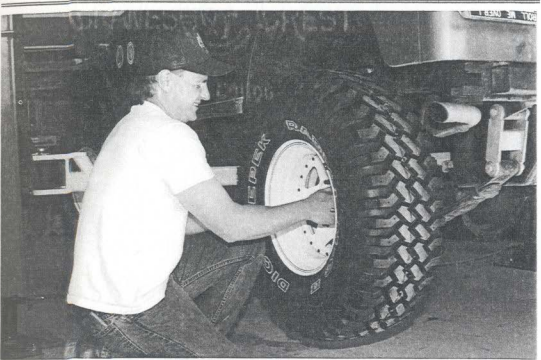
TABLE: 4.22 Jim's Performance Correlatives

## Matt Smith's 1980 Jeep CJ-7

Like the Broadbents, Matt Smith is a member of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*. But the similarity of club affiliation does not mean that the Jeeps are modified alike. Matt chose a 1980 Jeep CJ-7 instead of a Wrangler for his build-up. This choice resulted from two factors. First, Matt wanted a small, agile, rig for the back country; and second, it had to be affordable for his family budget. He found what he was looking for in the CJ-7 he currently drives. It was small and fit into his budget.

The first modification Matt made to the Jeep was replacing the stock suspension with a softer one to improve its rock crawling capabilities. He chose a set of 2.5 inch *Rancho Suspension* springs. Combining this lift with one inch taller shackles provided approximately 3.5 inches of suspension lift. Movement of the new springs is damped by a set of adjustable *Rancho "9000"* shocks. Like the Broadbents, Matt has found the versatility of these shocks to be noteworthy. This lift is relatively mild, but Matt has found that it serves him well. Recently he has attempted more difficult trails and is planning on replacing the springs with a set of 3.5 inch *Superlift* units. He believes these will give him a taller stance over the 33 inch tall *Dick Cepek "Mud Country II"* tires that he purchased during the Summer of 1996 (fig: 4.23). He also thinks the *Superlift* springs will give an even softer and more compliant ride.

Matt retained his stock axles. But the gears were changed from the stock 3.5:1s to a low 4.56:1 set. These low gears are excellent for crawling over the rocky



**FIG: 4.23** David Mosher mounts a set of new tires on Matt's Jeep at *Mountain West Off-Road Supply Inc.*

terrain he enjoys. When replacing the gears, Matt installed a *Loc-Right* locker in the rear axle. Like the *ARB* "Air Lockers" in the Broadbents' axles, the unit in Matt's axle provides traction to both tires. But this unit differs from *ARB* lockers because it cannot be turned on and off. Matt noted that he needs a locker for the trails he does and that the *Loc-Right* performs well and fits his budget. The differential in his front axle is the stock "open" unit.

The stock *Dana* "300" transfer case is retained because Matt feels—as do many—that its performance simply cannot be beaten. It is strong and provides good gear reduction. Matt figures he has the best unit available and does not need to change it. His stock transmission, however, was not as desirable. It was discarded and a *Borg Warner* "T-5" manual unit from a 1984 Jeep was installed. This

transmission provides Matt with the low gearing and strength needed for tough back-country driving. Although he is currently planning to replace this unit with one that has a 5th gear for freeway driving—Matt says that the 55 mph (maximum speed) highway drives to the trails with his low geared Jeep are a nightmare—the off-road performance has been exemplary.

Much of Matt's time has been spent on his rig's motor. When asked why he spent so much time on it, he commented that this resulted from his love for hot rods. He decided to keep the stock Pontiac 151 "Iron Duke" 4 cylinder engine for his build-up. The 4 cylinder, while giving good gas mileage, also provides a respectable platform for a torque producing power source: this means that Matt will have reliable power while crawling at slow trail speeds. The engine has been thoroughly re-built. On top of the engine, a *Weber* carburetor feeds gasoline while a *Cagle* fuel regulator assures that this flow is smooth. According to Matt, the *Cagle* even allows the gas flow—without sloshing—into the engine while the vehicle is climbing straight up or down ledges. He also swears that his *Cagle* improved gas mileage by approximately 30%. Matt is so happy with his Jeep's performance using the *Cagle* that he assured me that any carburetted vehicle he builds will have one.<sup>23</sup>

Matt currently uses his stock roll-bar for roll-over protection, but he notes that a roll-cage will soon be added. The Jeep's dashboard sports special gauges to help him keep an eye on his motor. He has replaced the stock engine gauges with accurate *Autometer* racing units (fuel pressure, oil temperature, water temperature,

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, based upon the improved performance of Matt's Jeep, and his rave reviews of the *Cagle*, I put one on my Bronco.

voltmeter). These help him monitor the "vital statistics" of his engine at all times.

To help Matt see the numerous trail obstacles at night, he augments light from a set of *Dick Cepek* race headlights with two *Dick Cepek* auxiliary lights. These are mounted high on his windshield frame. A special extra-capacity 26 gallon fuel tank allows Matt to go farther into the outback without having to carry spare gas cans.

Matt's Jeep is a great example of a rig that is a compromise between the desire to have a hard-core 4x4 and the need to use it every day as a daily driver. Each modification step Matt has taken not only uses construction techniques designed to make it perform off-road, but also takes his family's needs--and budget--into account. Consequently, he spent "more time on mechanicals than looks." However--as previously noted--shortly after discussing his Jeep with me, Matt was involved in a serious accident that destroyed the rig's driver's side. Rather than fix the body, Matt opted to replace it with a fiberglass unit. His Jeep is now brilliant white and will remain rust-free. He reported that the new body "works great, why wouldn't it" (7/1997)?



FIG: 4.24 Matt Smith's Jeep with its set of new 33" tall Dick Cepek "Mud Country II" tires.



FIG: 4.25 Matt's Jeep sits on the sand at Utah Lake.

## Matt Smith's 1980 Jeep CJ-7

Vehicle Modifications	Performance Correlatives									
	Clearance	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Built-In/Proof Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Rock Protection	Lighting
Tires	33" "Dick Cepek"	••		••						
Front Axle	Sock	••								
Rear Axle	Sock									
Axle Gears	4.56:1			••		••				
Front Locker	"Lock 'Open"				••					
Rear Locker	"Lock-Right" Locker			••	••	••				
Transmission	"Borg Warner" T-5			••	••	••				
Transfer Case	Sock "Thaw" 300			••	••	••				
Fuel Delivery	"Welder Cab" Fuel Regulator				••		••			
Engine	Pontiac 151 4 Cyl				••					
Springs	"Rancher" 2.5"	••	••	••						
Front Shackles	"Trunker" Extended	••	••	••	••					••
Rear Shackles	"Trunker" Extended	••	••	••	••					••
Shocks	"Rancher" 9000		••	••						
Roll Bar	Sock							••		
Roll Cyls	None									
EXTRA ADDITIONS										
1. lights	"Dick Cepek" Headlights									••
2. lights	"Dick Cepek" Hoods									••
BODY ARMOR										
Rear Bumper	Custom Built								••	

TABLE 4.16 Matt's Performance Correlatives

## "Doc" Ed Isaacson's 1983 Jeep CJ-7

Dr. Edward Isaacson has also built a praiseworthy Jeep. He, too, is a member of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* club, and uses the rig for outings such as: club rides, camping, hunting, and chances to gather his family together. He notes that he chose to build a Jeep because he had wanted one from the time he "was a youngster." His approach to building the rig has been to "beef-up" its weak links so as to "nip any problems in the bud," that might occur on tough trails. All modifications are oriented towards creating a bullet-proof rig capable of competently traversing any trail without the danger of breaking parts—which Ed said that he used to do "every time I went out."

Ed opted for a *Rancho* 2.5 inch suspension lift. He is pleased with the soft ride the springs give and says that it provides improved performance over the stiff stock springs. Ed also states that it rides significantly better than inferior systems he tried earlier, when he "did not know how to build his Jeep correctly." He added a set of 3/4 inch lift *Con-Ferr* shackles to boost vehicle height. This provides room for the 33 inch tall *Kelly* "DTR" mud tires to progress through their full range of movement. The springs are damped by *Rancho* "5000" non-adjustable shocks.

Ed got tired of fixing broken axles after driving tough trails, so he had a pair of heavy-duty ones built. He informs me that he has had no trouble with this set. The rear is a custom-built *Dana* "44" with 4.10:1 gears. The axle shafts themselves are heavy-duty *Moser* units, which are known for their resiliency and resistance to



shattering. A rear *ARB* "Air Locker" provides manually activated traction. The front axle also has an "Air Locker" in it. The front axle is special because Ed had Charlie Copsey, another *Lone Peak* member, change the light duty front *Dana* "30" axle into a heavy duty *Dana* "44." The stock *Dana* "30" housing was used, but heavier-duty *Dana* "44" "guts" have replaced the stock unit's insides. This may not seem special, but this combination has never before been accomplished. The benefits are a smaller external axle size—hence more ground clearance—and a lighter weight than that of a *Dana* "44." Despite the lighter weight and smaller size, the axle is as strong as the *Dana* "44," which is regularly sturdier.

Ed saw no trouble with the stock transfer case and manual transmission. But the straight-six engine has been rebuilt with some mild performance additions. This combination provides more horsepower, as well as low-end torque, for rugged rock crawling. Gas enters the engine through a *Weber* carburetor. Like many other Rock Crawlers, Ed uses a *Weber* because it is reliable off-road. No matter how rough a trail gets, these units provide consistent fuel flow—a trait not found in many carburetors. The carburetor draws air through a washable (and re-usable) high-flow *K&N* air filter.

The C-J-7's exterior has some special features. Ed installed *Smittybuilt* nerf bars to protect the undercarriage during trips onto rugged outback trails. He also removed and replaced the stock bumpers with heavy duty units offering more protection. These also allow the Jeep to scale larger objects without scaping on rocks and other objects. A *Ramsey* 8000 pound winch is mounted to the front

bumper. The winch is used extensively on difficult trips like *Surprise Canyon*—which is one of Ed's favorites. For many other trips, it has proven useful in helping others out of trouble. A dual battery system ensures that there is always enough power flowing to the winch. The Jeep's rear corners are protected by aluminum "tall corners." This aluminum corner plating protects the body from being gouged by jagged rocks common to trails like *Sledgehammer*.

Ed always considers parts he believes will make the rig reliable off-road. The interior of the Jeep exemplifies this goal as much as the undercarriage. The stock roll-bar has been extended to a full roll-cage with custom-bent tubing. This "cage" provides considerably more protection than the stock roll-bar. Occupants sit on comfortable aftermarket bucket seats. The seats cut-down on fatigue that mounts during bouncy back country trips. The interior also has several lockable organizers for equipment and parts that might be needed on the trail.

Ed has built a Jeep for usage on some of the hardest trails in Utah and California. Although its form is not as radical as some of the other Jeeps on these trails, it is, nevertheless, built extremely well. In fact, its body and mechanicals are in far better condition than many of the other rigs on trails he frequents. This attests to Ed's good driving abilities. It also results from his striving to use only the best and most reliable modifications on his 4x4.

Not long after discussing his Jeep with me, Ed replaced its engine with one from a Jeep owned by Jim Broadbent. His old engine had seen many miles, and it was time for a newer and more dependable one. For additional comfort, he has also added deep, plush, sheepskin covers to all the seats. These "breath well" and add

off-road cushioning. All of these modifications comprise the complete unit which Ed and his family use to travel off-road. Ed and his Jeep are often brought-up by Rock Crawlers in the Utah Valley area as an example of a driver and Jeep that can venture nearly anywhere with reliability.



FIG: 4.27 The Isaacsons on the *Sledgehammer* trail. Notice the chrome nerf bars. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



FIG: 4.28 The Isaacsons climb *Surprise Canyon*. This trail necessitates lockers. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)

## Dr. Edward Isaacson's 1983 Jeep CJ-7

Performance Correlatives												
Vehicle Modifications		Clearance	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Brake/Power Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Rock Protection	Lifting	Extraction Help
Tires	33" "Kelly" DTR	••	••		••	••						
Front Axle	Custom "Draw" 30					••						
Rear Axle	"Draw" 44				••	••						
Axle Gears	4.10:1				••		••					
Front Locker	"ARB" Air Locker				••	••						
Rear Locker	"ARB" Air Locker				••	••						
Transmission	Shock											
Transfer Case	Stock "Draw" 300					••	••					
Fuel Delivery	"Weber" Carb.					••		••				
Engine	Stock 258 6 cyl.					••						
Springs	"Rancher" 2.5"	••	••	••	••							
Front Shocks	"Con Fer" 34"	••	••	••	••	••						
Rear Shocks	"Con Fer" 34"	••	••	••	••	••						
Shocks	"Rancher" 5000			••	••							
Roll Bar	Custom Built								••			
Roll Cage	Custom Built								••			
EXTRA ADDITIONS												
Winch	"Rancher" 8000 lb.											••
Lights	"Dick Creak"										••	
BODY ARMOR												
Door Bars	"Smileybar"									••		
Front Bumper	"Rock Crawler"		••							••		
Rear Bumper	"Rock Crawler"		••							••		
Cover Protect	Aluminum Diamond Plate									••		

TABLE 4.29 Ed's Performance Correlatives

## Chip Brox's 1978 Jeep CJ-5

Chip Brox lives in Moab, Utah, and regularly uses his 4x4 on some of the toughest trails in the American West. Moab, the mecca of north American rock crawling, is as rugged as it is beautiful. Consequently, Chip's Jeep must be ready for tough usage on the sandstone rocks surrounding his home. He chose a CJ-5 because its small size enables him to easily get into, and out of, tight situations common to this locale.

Chip took a no-nonsense approach to suspension design, opting for basics known for their reliability. He began with soft riding 2.5 inch *Rancho* springs front and rear. This mild lift was boosted slightly with longer than stock *Tomken* shackles. The combination of springs and shackles provides approximately 3 inches of suspension height. To this, he added a custom-built 2 inch body lift. A body lift lifts the vehicle's body by raising it away from the frame with spacers. It is an easy way to gain height without changing the suspension. Instead of using graphite blocks—as is common with the mass-produced body lift kits—Chip machined the spacers from solid aluminum blocks. He feels that they are less likely to shear during the harsh jolts occurring on heavy trails.

The five inches of added vehicle height create different handling characteristics. To control the vehicle better, Chip added *Rancho* "9000" series adjustable shocks. Like many serious Rock Crawlers, Chip uses these rather than other types because of the versatility they offer. Their adjustability allows him to

change their damping to suit any driving environment.

Chip's no-nonsense approach to modification is carried through to his axles. Only the parts he feels are weak links were replaced. The stock rear AMC model "20" axle was retained along with its stock 3.73:1 gears. A *Detroit Locker* provides continuous traction to the rear tires through the most unruly terrain. (This, like the *Lock-Right* unit in Matt's Jeep, works constantly.) The stock front axle was also retained. This unit, a *Dana* "30," also has 3.73:1 gears. But Chip did not want a *Detroit Locker* in the front axle because its lack of complete differentiation can create steering difficulties while in 4-wheel drive. Instead, he opted for an *ARB* "Air Locker." The *ARB* gives Chip the option to turn off the locker in the front end when he doesn't need it, making steering "much easier."

The Jeep's stock *Dana* "20" transfer case was retained because Chip saw no need to replace what has been problem-free. The stock transmission was disposed-of to provide room for the manual transmission most widely used by Rock Crawlers, the nearly indestructible Ford "T-18." This transmission, taken from a heavy-duty Ford truck, is thoroughly bullet proof. In addition to its strength, it boasts an extremely low "granny" first gear. Chip has not had to put lower gears in his axles because of the low transmission gearing. Avoiding very low axle gears is a bonus because the lower the gears used, the weaker they become, due to the smaller teeth used for reduction. By spreading the gear reduction throughout the entire drive train, Chip avoids localized breakage. The low gearing easily spins 33 inch tall and 12.5 inch wide *BFGoodrich* "Moab Edition Mud Terrain" tires.

Chip's pragmatic building technique extends to the motor; the stock 304cid V8 engine is retained. Conservatively rebuilt, it uses a stock, reliable, *Motorcraft* carburetor. It does, however, boast high performance exhaust headers, which vent spent exhaust gasses away from the engine. While I was interviewing Chip he proudly displayed a set of *Hooker* headers that had been ceramic coated by his son. The units awaited a free afternoon when Chip could install them. The ceramic coating on the headers reduces engine compartment heat by up to 20%.

Heat is an enemy of a rock crawling engine. Ultra-slow outback speeds don't allow enough air through the radiator to adequately cool vehicle power plants. And hot ones don't live long; the addition of anything that reduces heat in the engine compartment is beneficial. Because of high ambient heat in the raw desert topography Chip frequents, these headers are an important addition.

Chip built the front bumper on his Jeep so that he could fit a front winch without "reducing air flow to the radiator." He feels that his special design helps to keep air flowing into the engine compartment. The winch has proven helpful for rescuing less skilled drivers while Chip leads trail rides during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. An *Olympic* rear bumper protects the Jeep's "rear end." For increased passenger safety Chip augmented the roll-bar with a *Smittybuilt* roll-cage kit. He also added custom seats that provide comfort during long off-road trips. Rough trails in such a short wheelbase 4x4 can be harsh on those inside; these seats add a touch of comfort.

Chip's Jeep has been built to perform specifically in the southern Utah area.



That Chip changes very little on it now attests to his confidence in the rig's construction. After all, Chip reasons, there is little need to change what works well already. Chip has, however, installed the set of performance headers. He notes that they work well at boosting engine power and also at keeping the engine compartment cool. During a 1997 trail ride he noted that under extreme flexing situations the driver's side header knocks the floor boards under his feet. He informed me that some minor changes are in order so that this problem could be resolved. As with the rest of his rig, Chip takes care of all the important details so they will not become problems while on a trail far from home.



FIG: 4.30 Chip's Jeep parked during a break while on the *Salt Creek Canyon* trail.



FIG: 4.31 The custom body lift blocks are visible between the body and the bumper at the back of Chip's Jeep.

## Chip Brox's 1978 Jeep CJ-5

Performance Correlatives												
Vehicle Modifications		Clearance	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Bullet Proof Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Rock Protection	Lighting	Extraction Help
Tires	33" "HF Goodrich"	••	••		••							
Front Axle	Stock											
Rear Axle	Stock											
Axle Gears	3.72:1											
Front Locker	"ARB" Air Locker				••	••						
Rear Locker	"Dana" Locker				••	••						
Transmission	T-18 "Tru"				••	••	••					
Transfer Case	Stock											
Wheel Delivery	Stock Cab							••				
Engine	Stock 304					••						
Springs	"Rancho" 2.5"	••	••	••	••							
Front Shackles	"Tombler" Extended	••	••			••						
Rear Shackles	Stock											
Shocks	"Rancho" 9000			••	••				••			
Rear Bar	Stock								••			
Roll Cages	"Jumpshlt" Kit								••			
EXTRA ADDITIONS												
Winch	"Warn" 8000 lb											••
body Lift	Custom 2.0"	••	••									
lights	Windshield Rack										••	
BODY ARMOR												
front bumper	Custom Bunk		••							••		
Rear bumper	"Orange"									••		

TABLE 4.32 Chip's Performance Correlatives

## Victor Mokler's 1985 Jeep CJ-7

Victor is from Boulder, Colorado; I first interviewed him during a break on the *Hell's Revenge* trail, during the 1996 *Jeep Safari*. He is an avid Rock Crawler who goes to Moab when he can; he also spends much of his time exploring the difficult mountain trails around Boulder. His rig has a distinctive look and performs well, so when he came over to talk with me about my research, I took the opportunity to ask him some questions of my own.

Victor's rig sits on 3 inch tall *Black Diamond Suspensions* springs. He has tried several suspension systems and feels that these ride best. The soft-riding springs are attached to the frame via one inch lift *Tomken* shackles. Non-adjustable *Black Diamond "XT"* shocks damp spring oscillation. He used these shocks because they are "made to work with the springs."

Victor retained his stock axles and their 3.54:1 gears. He did, however, put an *ARB "Air Locker"* in the rear axle to facilitate traction in rough environments. He also retained the stock *Dana "300"* transfer case because of its strength and gear reduction. The transmission, however, was exchanged in favor of a better unit. Victor implanted a *New Process "435"* manual transmission scavenged from a 1 ton Ford truck. This transmission is extremely strong and provides an incredibly low "6.81:1 'granny low'" first gear. He states: "The reason I chose that transmission was it has one of the lowest first-gear ratios. And it has a very simple design, and as such, its easy to repair. I can do most of the work myself" (1/21/1997). Like

Chip's gearing strategy, Victor spreads gear reduction throughout his drive train rather than dropping it drastically all in one place. This strategy provides reliable and low reduction.

The CJ-7's motor is relatively stock: the "258" straight-six has had its output boosted with the addition of a *Weber* carburetor. Victor chose the *Weber* for its ability to reliably feed the engine gas during the roughest terrain—which many similar units fail to do. The carb draws its air through a high-flow *K&N* filter. The carburetor's reliability is enhanced with a fuel regulator. This unit, like that in Matt's Jeep, gives Victor's rig the ability to ascend and descend steep terrain without the engine sputtering. In the mountainous and rocky areas Victor frequents this is imperative for reliable performance.

Engine power is fed to the ground through 32 inch tall *Mickey Thompson* "Baja Belted" tires. Victor chose these tires because of the sidewall protection on their tread design. This refers to the way the treads wrap all the way down the sides of the tires, protecting them from cuts by rocks or roots. This tread also provides excellent traction in nearly any terrain. At 12.5 inches, these tires are wider than most other 32 inch tall tires. This width gives him the wide stance he feels is necessary for vehicle stability.

The stock roll-bar was enhanced by the addition of a *Smittybuilt* roll-cage. This combination provides Victor and his passengers with the protection needed on potentially dangerous trails. A set of *Smittybuilt* nerf bars protect the Jeep's rocker panels from rock damage. The front end is protected by a *Currie Enterprises*

bumper. This bumper allows Victor to approach large rocks without scraping. It also protects the *Ramsey* "Pro-9000" winch mounted to the vehicle's frame. Like Victor's other additions, the winch helps him traverse rough terrain common to the trails winding through the Rocky Mountain chain. A high power *Optima* battery provides ample electricity for the winch. 150 watt KC lights provide lighting for night trail rides.

Inside, Victor's major change was the addition of comfortable *Flo-Fit* seats. The seats provide a snug, comfortable, fit that keeps passengers from bouncing around during tough trails. Victor's CJ-7 is a unique rig. Its mixture of good design and function-oriented additions make the Jeep competent—but not overbuilt—for the trails Victor travels.

Victor's Jeep sees regular heavy usage on trails throughout Colorado. During the Summer of 1997, he discussed some of the modifications that he has made to the rig since the Summer of 1996, when we initially discussed its form. The list was extensive. For instance, he has completely re-built his motor "because it was getting tired." He built it to stock specifications, using upgraded parts so that it would be "reliable." He is now planning to "slightly drop" the gear ratio in his axles.

One common aspect of each of the changes Victor has made to his Jeep is that they resulted from Victor's experiences off-road. He takes these incidents to heart, then searches for modifications to remedy these situations. When he has found what suits his experiences, the changes are made to the Jeep. This process has created a rig that performs comfortably and reliably anywhere Victor takes it.



**FIG: 4.33** Notice the sidewall tread protecting the sides of Victor's tires. This keeps rocks from slashing them. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)



**FIG: 4.34** Gearing and a locker combine to help Victor scale *Tip-Over Challenge* on *Hell's Revenge* trail. Chris Stephens, the trail leader, spots for Victor in the upper left corner. (Courtesy Victor Mokler)

## Victor Mokler's 1985 Jeep CJ-7

Vehicle Modifications		Performance Correlatives										
		Clearance	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Bullet Proof Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Rock Protection	Lighting	Extraction Help
Tires Front Axle Rear Axle Axle Gears Front Locker Rear Locker Transmission Transfer Case Fuel Delivery Engine Springs Front Shackles Rear Shackles Shocks Roll Bar Roll Cylc	32" "Mickey Thompson"	••	••		••							
	Stock											
	Front Axle											
	Rear Axle											
	3.54:1											
	Stock "Open"				••	••						
	"ARB" Air Locker				••	••	••					
	NP 435				••	••	••					
	Stock "Dana" 300				••	••	••		••			
	"Van" W/Fuel Regulator					••						
	Stock 258 6 cyl		••	••	••		••			••		
	"Black Diamond" 3.0"		••	••	••	••	••					••
Winch Lights  BODY ARMOR Neck Flare Front Bumper U-Bolt Stile	"Tonker" Extended	••	••	••	••	••						
	"Tonker" Extended	••	••	••	••	••						
	"Black Diamond" XT			••	••							
	Stock								••			
	Roll Bar								••			
	"Sammyball" Kit								••			
	Roll Cylc											
	EXTRA ADDITIONS											
	Winch	9000 lb "Renny"										••
	Lights	"KC" Daylighters									••	
	BODY ARMOR											
	Neck Flare	"Sammyball"								••		
Front Bumper	"Curry Enterprises"		••						••			
U-Bolt Stile	"Tonker"					••			••			

TABLE 4.35 Victor's Performance Correlatives



## Charlie Copsey's 1978 Jeep CJ-7

Charlie Copsey is probably the most hard-core Rock Crawler that I have met. He spends virtually every spare moment on a trail somewhere. His love of 4-wheeling is so great that he quit his job as master mechanic at a Chevrolet dealership in Orem, Utah, to open a business of his own--*Just For Fun Motorsports*--that specializes in constructing rock crawlers. This allows him to be involved with the Rock Crawling community all the time. He is also a leading force in the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*. Charlie has a rig that is as radical as the trails he frequents and it speaks of his full-time commitment to rock crawling.

Charlie started the modifications to his Jeep with the suspension. As on the Broadbents' Wrangler (whose suspension he built), Charlie opted for a spring-over axle conversion. To give the softest and most flexible ride, Charlie used stock Jeep Wrangler front springs at each his CJ-7's four corners. These long springs--mounted over the axle--provide approximately five inches of suspension lift. All the Jeep's stock spring mounts had to be replaced to accommodate the new springs' longer lengths and increased widths. Charlie attached the front springs to the mounts with the shackles moved to the rear of the spring instead of the front. This "shackle reversal" helps the Jeep climb ledges and steep hills better. Such operations also make the "sloppy" Jeep steering more responsive.

Charlie uses the multiple adjusting *Rancho* "9000" shocks on the front axle to tailor-fit his front ride quality to each scenario he enters. On the rear axle he uses

*Rancho* "5000" non-adjustable shocks. According to Charlie, the completed suspension system not only provides impressive wheel travel, it is also bullet proof.

The suspension is not the only aspect of this rig that is set-up for extreme driving. Charlie scrapped the stock axles, replacing both with heavy duty *Dana* "44" units that he constructed. The rear sports 4.10:1 gears and a *Detroit Locker*. Like the *Loc-Right* unit in Matt's Jeep, this works full-time and cannot be turned on and off like an *ARB*. Charlie is adamant in his support of the *Detroit* design and uses them in *both axles* because he believes they are the strongest lockers on the market. He stresses that he only uses something he can "*always* rely upon." The front axle also has 4.10:1 gears. Both axles are filled with custom-built "guts" for ultimate strength. Due to the strain Charlie routinely places on his Jeep's parts he only uses the very toughest parts available to ensure that his rig will not break down.

Charlie implanted a *Dana* "300" transfer case because of its strength and gear reduction. He added a few custom modifications to the t-case to make it more versatile. These changes allow him to switch into front-wheel drive and rear-wheel drive. Stock units cannot do this. This modification allows him to route power to a given axle in the unlikely event that the other axle is broken. This also allows him to "shut off" his front axle in tight steering situations off-road, since the *Detroit* can make it hard to steer.

A "700-R4" automatic transmission was scavenged from a Corvette. Charlie believes that one of the best modifications to a vehicle is the addition of an automatic transmission. He feels that on rugged terrain the transmission can do the work of

"feathering power" to the wheels. He stresses that this is better than drivers attempting to use the clutch in regularly occurring awkward situations. Of course some drivers argue for the benefits of manual transmissions, but Charlie always uses automatics. He believes the "700-R4" is a great unit because it can be easily built for heavy off-road driving. Because of its overdrive, the "700-R4" also provides comfortable vehicle use on freeways, even with low axle gears.

Charlie's engine easily turns the rig's radically treaded 33 inch tall and 14 inch wide *Super Swamper* [mud] "Bogger" tires. He started with a Corvette 350cid V8 engine and re-built it with a host of high-tech modifications and parts. This combination provides explosive, yet reliable, power. Instead of carburetion, Charlie uses a tuned-port fuel injection unit from a Corvette. However, the unit is not stock. He customized the computer control and modified the fuel injectors for extremely accurate and reliable fuel transfer. Throttle response is immediate, and controlled, in any situation—even if the vehicle is upside down!

The engine's exhaust is vented through ceramic coated racing "shorty" headers. The coating helps keep engine compartment temperatures as cool as possible. Charlie knows engine heat is often a rock crawler's worst enemy and, like Chip, he has taken steps to eliminate this dangerous situation.

To further aid engine cooling, a special heavy-duty radiator sits behind the front grille. A mechanical clutch-operated fan is spun by the motor; a second "pusher" fan in front of the radiator aids the clutch fan. The "pusher" fan is an electric unit controlled by a thermostat that activates it at a specific engine compartment temperature. The two fans, coupled with the special radiator, keep the

engine at safe temperatures, even on trails during the hottest desert heat.

Inside the Jeep is a roll-bar taken from a Jeep Wrangler. Charlie likes its design because it gives people in the rear seat shoulder seatbelt harnesses, a safety option other roll-bars do not offer. A custom-built roll-cage was grafted to the roll-bar to further protect vehicle occupants. Aftermarket seats cradle occupants; these comfortable units prevent the fatigue that occurs on long, rough, trails. Charlie built an aluminum dash to house *Autometer*™ race series gauges that monitor all engine functions.” Charlie notes that knowing what is “going on under the hood” helps drivers stop bad problems before they occur.

Charlie built the front and rear bumpers. They are considerably tougher than stock and, like the Isaacsons’ bumpers, provide room for climbing over rocks without scraping. Above the front bumper is a 9000 pound winch; it is mandatory for the brutal trails Charlie frequents, like *Sledgehammer* and *Surprise Canyon*. Charlie also constructed a heavy-duty spare tire carrier that mounts to the rear bumper.

After discussing his Jeep with me following the 1996 *Easter Jeep Safari*, Charlie went on to completely re-construct the rig’s suspension. The new creation pushed known suspension design to the limits, and was built to maximize suspension travel for extreme driving. However, after several months of usage he switched it all back to the system he was using at the time of our discussion in 1996. He switched back because “you want to stay pretty conservative. That’s more reliable” (7/1997). Although conservative for Charlie is still fairly radical for others, it is important to note Charlie’s modifications always try and test the newest and

most current alterations. These changes reflect his efforts to constantly push both his own limits and those of his machine.



FIG: 4.36 Charlie's Jeep ramps 1000.



FIG: 4.37 Charlie's CJ-7 in a trail line-up during the 1996 Moab Easter Jeep Safari.

# Charlie Copsey's 1978 Jeep CJ-7

Performance Correlatives										
Vehicle Modifications		Clearance	Approach and Departure Angles	Long Travel Suspension	Traction	Bullet Proof Drive-Train	Gear Reduction	Reliable Fuel Delivery	Roll-Over Protection	Extraction Help
Tires	33" Super Swamper® Boggers	••	••		••	••				
Front Axle	"Dana" 44					••				
Rear Axle	"Dana" 44					••				
Axle Gears	4.10:1				••		••			
Front Locker	"Detroit Locker"				••	••				
Rear Locker	"Detroit Locker"				••	••				
Transmission	Corvette 700-R4				••	••	••			
Transfer Case	"Dana" 300				••	••	••			
Fuel Delivery	Tune-Port Fuel Injection					••		••		
Engine	Chevy 383					••				
Springs	Wrangler Springs Over Axles	••	••	••	••					
Front Shackles	Custom Extended	••	••	••	••	••				
Rear Shackles	Custom Extended	••	••	••	••	••				
Shocks	"Rancho" 5000&9000			••	••					
Roll Bar	Wrangler Roll Bar								••	
Roll Cage	Custom Built								••	
EXTRA ADDITIONS										
Winch	9000 lb "Ramsey"									••
BODY ARMOR										
Bumpers	Custom Built		••							

TABLE: 4.38 Charlie's Performance Correlatives

## THE PROCESS AND PEOPLE OF RIG BUILDING

Vehicle building entails more than a series of parts coming together. The process involves people, time, and many construction locations. This does not occur quickly or randomly. Rather, most vehicles are created through a series of "build-ups"—or discrete building projects—that can lengthen a vehicle's creation over months and years. In 1992, Jeff Dixon, a Rock Crawler from Provo, Utah, commented on this process after returning from a lengthy trail ride on the *Rubicon* trail near Lake Tahoe, California (F map 1). He noted that many of the rigs there had been years in-the-making. He was especially impressed with a few 4x4s that had been built by retirees. According to Jeff, several of these were produced through a construction process extending for twenty-five years or more.

Like rock crawler morphologies, build-ups are similar to a collage. Builders use a host of differing resources and strategies to collect and install parts in the construction process of their 4x4s. In fact, good rig builders are really master organizers. At any one time several different projects may be under way. Good builders must orchestrate parts, mechanics, dealers, friends, personal time, and other resources all at once to complete their rig.

Parts are found through local junk yards, auto parts dealers, distant mail-service specialty houses, or they are traded with other Rock Crawlers. Considerable time is spent finding the correct ones; often a single part may have varying qualities depending upon the year it was created. For instance, Shannon Shirk needed an



"early Dana '20' transfer case" for his Bronco because they utilize "a lower gear ratio than the later models" (Shannon Shirk, 4/1996). The necessity of a specific model--and its relative scarcity--can make a search for this, or other parts, more difficult than a simple trip to the local Ford dealer. Often, the Rock Crawlers, themselves, know more about the statistics of these parts than the auto dealerships.

Networks within the community help to locate such parts. Once "the word is out" that an individual needs a part, others use their own contacts to help find what is needed. For instance, during a conversation about Jeep Wrangler suspension and drive train building strategies, Kevin Perry, a Utah Valley Rock Crawler, asked me to "keep a lookout for International Scout axles" (9/13/1997). He wants them because they are the strong Dana "44" axles. Plus, they have desirable "high" steering knuckles that cannot be found on any other vehicle.

Through networks, Jeff Dixon was able to acquire body parts, information, and axles, for the Land Cruiser he built during the early nineties. He was informed about *Specter Off-Road Inc.*, a business in California that specializes in performance aftermarket parts for Land Cruisers. Others similarly learn of shops or collectors that deal in specialty components, or that sell hard to find factory parts. Networking is a crucial aspect of the construction process; without such resources rock crawlers simply could not be built.

Once parts are found, they are incorporated into the vehicle in one of two ways: either the builder does the work, or they have a specialist do it. Victor Mokler describes his building process at length; his comments are indicative of many Rock

Crawlers attitudes towards building-up a rig.

I do about seventy-five percent of the work myself. Basically, everything I can do, I do. I do all the maintenance work: changing oil, differential oil, t-case oil, brake pads and shoes, greasing etc. I do all the body work and painting, all the electrical work, all the suspension work, replacing axles, tranny swap, engine swap etc. The engine will be rebuilt by a machine shop, and I have the differential and gear work and welding done by a shop. I purchase most parts pre-made rather than fabricating things myself—motor mounts, bumpers, tire carrier, etc. That's not to say that I don't make things myself, but most of the stuff I buy. I would like to learn how to weld though, it's just a very handy skill to have. (5/13/1997)

Victor, like most builders, does as much of the work on his rig as he can. Of course some people have greater mechanical abilities than others. For instance, where Victor replaces his own axles, others may enlist a local specialist to do such work. Ed Isaacson, Jim Broadbent, myself, and others, have hired Charlie Copsey—a fellow Rock Crawler with special talents and a shop—to do axle work.

A specialist may not always be a mechanic in a shop. Certain Rock Crawlers may become known as "specialists" in certain modifications. When Allan Olsen, a Cherokee-owning Rock Crawler in Provo, Utah, produced a stunning front bumper for his rig, Dan Wynkoop (also Cherokee owner) was so impressed that he asked Allan to fabricate one for his rig. The completed bumper was then powder coated<sup>24</sup> by Brian Tanner, another Rock Crawler who owns a "specialty coatings" and paint shop (coincidentally, Brian is also a Cherokee owner).

As mentioned earlier, builders must be master organizers. While an axle is

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<sup>24</sup> *Powder coat* is a special finish that is sprayed on (primarily metal) objects in a powder form and is then baked on in a large oven at 400 degrees. The resulting finish looks like paint; it is often used by Rock Crawlers because of its long-term resiliency.

being worked on in a shop, a vehicle owner may be at home in the garage preparing the suspension. At the same time, a low-geared transfer case may be en-route from a specialty dealer a state or more away. Meanwhile, a friend could be custom-welding new a roll cage. All these discrete actions must be tracked and managed so that the vehicle comes together as a synchronous whole.

Construction occurs in yards, driveways, garages, rented storage spaces, or even at a friend's place. If a driver has a spot that is easily accessible or convenient it can become work space:

I have a garage, and I do all the work there. Except the stuff I have to fix on the trail that is! I also do the real heavy work--tranny and engine swaps--at my friend's house in his garage. It's bigger, and he has a cherry picker [boom-lift], air tools, and an electric impact wrench. Not to mention, an extra set of hands and another brain never hurts. He's helped me refine several modifications...Its a good way to get well planned out modifications. (Victor Mokler, 5/13/1997)

Usually this work occurs after a builder's daily job and/or during the weekend. However, others spend even more time on their rig. During the Summer of 1997 Glenn Wakefield took a month off from work to rebuild his Samurai full-time.

Above, Victor describes his work in terms of associations with others. This is common because this interaction is one of the most important aspects of the building process. Vehicle build-ups become social events. Friends gather to help, comment on the modification, or discuss past and future trail rides as the work progresses. Some come just to watch. Nearly every time a builder speaks of the construction process, friends or associates are included in the commentary. Rarely is a Rock Crawler seen working on their 4x4 alone.

In addition to the social aspects provided by rig building, group interaction

also helps to alleviate the heavy costs associated with construction. Many modifications necessary to ready a rig for the trail are expensive. For instance, the parts and labor to install an *ARB "Air Locker"* in one axle amount to approximately twelve-hundred dollars. Having an extreme-duty axle custom-built by specialists such as *Curry Enterprises* or *Advanced Four-Wheel Drive* can run between fifteen-hundred and three-thousand dollars. And suspension systems can run from four-hundred to thousands of dollars. Installation by a mechanic costs even more. Asking knowledgeable friends to help on these projects often saves lots of cash.

Regardless of help from friends, rock crawling is an expensive sport. Jeff Dixon reported that some of the vehicles on the *Rubicon* trail exceeded fifty-thousand dollars. 4x4s frequenting the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* may cost even more. This is not to say that every rig entails such finances. Many drivers build excellent 4x4s for less than twenty-thousand dollars. However, rock crawling does require three things, time, money and friends. As such, dedication to the way of life that goes along with the sport is also essential to fabricating a "trail-worthy rig."

## CONCLUSION

The vehicle construction tradition is born of fundamental principles concerning outback conditions. These concepts form the conservative base—often tacitly assumed—from which builders cull as they begin the assemblage process (Bernstein, 57). Utilizing this canon of principles, builders are free to explore a range of

modification strategies held within communal networks (Taylor, 1982, 78-9; Pocius, 1979, 275). Some builders, like Chip and Matt, utilize fairly conservative means to achieve their desired ends, proving that "inventiveness is frequently...discerned no less in subtle variations upon traditional themes than in grandiose innovations" (Bird, 51). Others, like Charlie, employ new ideas and products. In this fashion, building strategies consistently create fresh designs within a traditional framework. Innovative and radical vehicle forms are continuously produced, while builders maintain their assemblage within the auspices of tradition.

The six 4x4s discussed above highlight the conservative, restricted, aspects of 4x4 construction. Yet they also exemplify the dynamic, elaborated, nature within the rock crawling vehicle building tradition. They are conservative because they arise from a restrictive, communally held, grammar dictating each rig's basic structural formulation. However, builders then combine their own creative impulses with their experiences of the outback to elaborate upon these conservative ideals. The process is thus subject to the individualistic ideals of each 4x4 owner. Each rig emerges as its builder's interpretation of the modifications necessary to competently perform in the back country.

To achieve this balance, builders assemble their vehicles like collages. Pieces are considered, fit, and re-tried until successful outcomes to specific problems are achieved. Thus construction is as much a cerebral process as a physical one. All the discrete parts must eventually come together to form a unified whole, or the final product is flawed.

Morphological studies such as this one often have a negative side effect.

That is, studying rules and procedures can down-play the importance of the individuals carrying out the artistic processes. Like other builders and artists Rock Crawlers are not automatons, mindlessly building. It is important to remember that such creative procedures are carried out in a specific cultural context. Neither are these folk lone creators, fabricating objects in seclusion, like Michael Owen Jones' reclusive chair builder, Chester Cornett (1989). Rock Crawlers assume that building is a social procedure; others are enlisted in the multifarious projects that cumulate in a trail rig. Friends and colleagues are integral to making decisions and carrying out the physical labor.

Build-ups are often protracted, entailing hours and years of work. Builders do not drop piles of cash on a mechanic's desk at one time. Rigs can get expensive because they are the cumulative product of years of work. Rather than sitting in a garage during a single elongated construction process, they are usually driven between modification spurts. After all, as Quinn Mortensen says: "They are built to be used, not to sit there and look pretty."

Chapter five shifts from the discussion of vehicles to elucidate trail rides. Trail rides provide the link between the social aspects of rock crawling and the culture's views of the landscape. These experiences—rooted in perceptions concerning the value and qualities inherent to the outback—are central to maintaining the communal structure of rock crawling. Because this play is neither random nor haphazard; it is bounded, controlled. From start to finish, each outback excursion is regulated by rules and ritualized behavior sequences. Trail rides—and the socializing that takes place before, during, and after these events—become forums for perpetuating views

concerning the character and value of the landscape, how one should interact with this landscape, and even what is acceptable social conduct. During these sequences more than mere play takes place, cultural ideals and expectations are played out--performed--in a public scenario. The back country landscape is the stage upon which these performances take place.

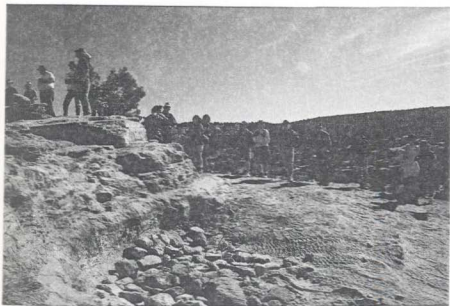
## COMMUNITAS: CELEBRATING THE LAND

This is a good way to leave town and do something [my son] really gets a kick out of. For me, it also helps me forget stresses of everyday life. When you are hovering on the edge of destructing your vehicle—you forget about the little pressures of life and let the adrenaline flow.

—Glenn Wakefield, *Interview 10/29/1996*

The landscape is not simply a static backdrop, but a dynamic player.

—Mary T. Hufford, *Chaseworld: Foxhunting and Storytelling in New Jersey's Pine Barrens*.



*Behind the Rocks* trail ride participants gather to watch vehicles attempt the climb up *White Knuckle Hill*, a six foot tall sandstone ledge. (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



## SOCIALIZING IN THE OUTBACK

Sacred places have been defined as those...landscapes which reinforce and even extol everyday patterns and special rituals of community life. (John Bale, 134)

The main reason I go to the safari is for camaraderie. I have friends all over the country who are 'wheelers'; Moab is a place to see them all and spend some time together having fun. I enjoy seeing other rigs and meeting new people too. (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996)

The sun has risen well into the sky but the morning air is still brisk. And the lack of cloud cover foretells a hot afternoon, so members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* arrive with the tops off their vehicles, wearing jackets and flannel shirts to keep warm until the chill is gone. Bristling with excitement, they hop from their rigs to greet each other, check-out modifications made to the vehicles since the last club trip, swap stories, and make last-minute adjustments before the group leaves. At the appointed time, the party takes off, travelling in a convoy towards the mountain trail.

Soon they are in the mountains far from town. Approaching a rocky sluice, the group stops and participants get out of their idling vehicles to survey the rocks. After walking through the section of trail—getting to know it—several drivers hop into

their rigs, each awaiting a turn to negotiate the twisted and fractured path. Other club members have remained among the rocks to guide the drivers with shouts of encouragement and hand signals. Still other club members sit at the sides of the trail shouting praises and jeers. After all the vehicles have traversed the rocky test, everyone gets back into their rigs and the group commences further along the trail.

The following discussion focuses on the social impact that back country spaces have upon those venturing within their bounds. Due to this influence, these locations are central to the rock crawling way of life. This centrality arises because they are locations for social interaction; in fact, rarely do individuals enter them alone. They are experienced through the group dynamic. This "social nature" of the outback is maintained through sets of rules. Breaking any of these can destroy group unity or the very illusion of being in a "pristine" wilderness.

The tenuous existence of the back country depends upon the actions of those interacting within its bounds. This chapter looks at trail ride rules; because rules governing outback social interaction perpetuate the values and structure of the community venturing there. Consequently, the very existence of rock crawling culture itself is equally dependent upon adherence to behavioral tenets practiced during these trips. The outback, then, becomes a forum for teaching and group-sanctioned social interaction that inevitably defines the group (Geertz, 1-27).

The following pages also investigate the existence of the outback, furthering the questions: "What is it?" and "How is it constituted?" Rock Crawlers view these spaces as worlds apart from those of ordinary life. They are zones where the community gathers together to work as a unit to traverse the landscape in their rigs.

As such, these locations are constituted ritually, and maintained as distinct conceptual units. As spatial units that are Other than those in the ordinary world, the outback must be created and bounded—separated. The outback, then, is not a specific tract of land. Rather, it can be any wilderness space into which a group ventures.<sup>1</sup> It need not always be far from civilization. This may seem contradictory, yet it is not. As long as trails seem remote, and offer chances for communal interaction among beautiful vistas, locations may be deemed “outback” by those Rock Crawlers venturing there. This does not, however, deny the fact that remote spaces are most often favored.

Describing what he liked about 4-wheeling in Farmington, New Mexico, Shannon Shirk noted: “The nice thing was...you got up and drove five minutes from your hotel and you were at the trail-head. I mean, literally, its right there in the middle of town. Almost. And there’s just tons of different trails right there; that was fun” (4/21/1996). Shannon exaggerates the trail’s location in relation to Farmington to emphasize its proximity to the town. For Shannon, and many other Rock Crawlers, physical distance from the urban world is not always what engenders feelings of escape. Rather, it is a location’s ability to provide feelings of being apart from everyday life, while being together as a group (Huizinga, 12, 19). The *Moab Rim* trail, as with many of those in the Moab area, overlooks Moab from its location on the towering cliffs surrounding the town. Yet it, like trails venturing far from town,

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<sup>1</sup> Drivers rarely go into the outback alone. They regularly venture there with other vehicles, or at least with several people in the vehicle. The nature of the terrain makes driving solo dangerous; lone drivers could be stranded if the vehicle becomes disabled. Additionally, solo trips negate the social aspect inherent to Rock Crawling.

is regarded as the back country.

As a "floating" concept, outback locations are made real through group interaction--such as rituals and/or play--that "inscribes" the tracts of land with community-based meaning (Hufford, 1992, 9). This meaning gives rise to the actions that perpetuate rock crawling culture. For Rock Crawlers the inscribed landscape is not an abstract concept. Rather, it is a reality into which the community ventures and exists.

This reality is created and experienced in three distinct stages: *preparation*, *the outback*, and the *return*. These periods are analogous to the staged scenes constituting a play. Each is a bounded reality existing as an integral part of the play, but distinct unto itself. These phases are important, for if one is deleted the play ceases to function.<sup>2</sup> The events experienced during each stage of a trail ride, like those of a play, are of utmost importance to the group while within the bounds setting this time and space apart. It is important to note that the outback is a place created and bounded in phases, during which meaningful social interaction occurs. There Rock Crawlers engage in efficacious and meaningful activities that have powerful ramifications extending into the work-a-day world.

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<sup>2</sup> These stages are also analogous to Arnold Van Gennep's pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases of rites of passage, see: *The Rites of Passage*.

## RITUALIZED ACTIVITIES AND PLAY

Before a discussion concerning back country ventures can continue, it is imperative to address the relationship between ritualized activities and play. Often these two performative contexts are perceived as existing at opposite ends of a spectrum, one—ritual—being serious, the other—play—being frivolous. However, these perceptions imply a false dichotomy which obscures a close relationship linking these two forms of performative expression (Birrell, 354; Driver, 82, 98-9, 164; Huizinga, 5, 8, 18-22).

First, it is important to understand the nature of play. Yes, play can be frivolous; yet more often it is "performed in the most perfect seriousness" (Huizinga, 18). Play takes on its seriousness because it is regularly "a representation of something"...and "representation means display" (13).<sup>3</sup> Often, the attitudes, beliefs, morals, aspirations, "culture specific...codes," and even world view of a community are exhibited during the play sphere (Miracle, 64). Think of the basic moral codes inherent to playing cowboys. This childhood game depicts "good in conflict with evil," and the bad guys are nearly always punished for their imagined transgressions (Bloodworth, 57). Such consequences are part of the game rules. No matter how basic, these values—maintained by a set of rules—are graphically performed during the play action (Caillois, 8; Hughes, 95-6; Huizinga, 10-11, 21).

As such graphic displays, play teaches. It also reifies the nature of society

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<sup>3</sup> See also Roger Caillios, 39-40; Patrick Biesty, 6-10.

and creates or maintains order (Huizinga, 10). Play thus has the ability to be a stabilizing and creative force within society.<sup>4</sup>

Trail rides embody the above-mentioned aspects of play. Therefore, they are more than the mere release of tension, they are culturally significant episodes which encapsulate—portray—community values. They represent chances to share “signs or symbols” (Miracle, 65). During these sequences, “[community] reaffirms the moral codes which constitute it as a society and renews its devotion to those values by [its] acts” (Shils & Young, 67). These acts “preserve.....reassert...or reconstruct...the [community] order” (Birrell, 355, 364).

Thus, for Rock Crawlers, trail rides are moments of socially important play (Bauman, 61-5). This play is beneficial to the participants on two levels: personal (individual), and social (group). This is because these events bring together individual Rock Crawlers and their community for the reciprocal advantage of both (Birrell, 355).

The nature and benefits of play are thus closely related to ritual, which can be described in similar terms (Rappaport, 249-54).<sup>5</sup> Ritual, too, is responsible for “the establishment of order and the deepening of communal life” (Driver, 166). The two cultural expressions are also similar because of their ability to “transport the participants to another world” (Huizinga, 18). Both, essentially, conjure a “time and place set apart from routine living” (Peterson, 258). This transportation can be either

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<sup>4</sup> Play also has the power to be a negative and/or destructive force within society.

<sup>5</sup> “Play and ritual grow together as dual focuses of the same process;” for more see: Birrell, 355. See also: Allen Gottmann, 15-55.

a mental and/or a physical one (Van Gennep, 15-18). That is, these activities take place in "a closed space [that] is marked out for it, either materially or ideally...[They are thus] hedged off from the everyday surroundings" (Huizinga, 19).

Being removed from the ordinary to the special entails certain benefits. This world-between-worlds is called a liminal space, and while within its bounds participants often experience a social jumbling called *communitas* (Victor Turner, 1991, 82). *Communitas* is created, "by [the liminal situation's] temporary suspension or distancing of [normal] social structure" (Driver, 160).<sup>6</sup> Hierarchical social roles from the mundane world do not apply. Employers may be subordinate or equal to their employees. Average people in the work-a-day world may be powerful leaders in this alternate sphere. For instance, Chris Stephens, a student at *Brigham Young University*, is transformed into an important leader when he guides the *Hell's Revenge* trail ride during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*.

Patrick Biesty draws a final link between play and ritual during his examination of the developmental aspects of play. This study comes close to discussing play as a type of ritual known as a rite of passage. Although these terms are not used, the similarity between the play world and the world of ritual seems inescapable:

Play [is] related to development in an interactive manner. Play displays the self's...condition in a celebratory self regard, and this display may itself be an act of developmental change and further display. Whatever the outcome of play, some potential developmental change is present due to the self-regard inherent in the action. (7)

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<sup>6</sup> Victor Turner argues that "communitas breaks in through the instances of structure in liminality...It is...held to be sacred or 'holy,' possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency" (1969, 115).

Thus, play and ritual come to be defined in closely-related terms. Both transport participants to another world, both present or display culturally held tenets and perceptions, and are powerful tools in affecting a change in the activity's participants.

This discussion may seem to break down the barrier thought to exist between play and ritual. However, the two performative activities are not the same. Their differences lie not in the outcome of the activities but rather in their applications. Play is seen primarily as diversion. Consequently it is used as such. That is, it is not consciously used as a force for cultural transformation. Thus, the transformation it engenders is merely a side-effect. Rituals, however, are perceived as being more substantive. Therefore, they are employed for transformative purposes in times of cultural significance, crises, or change. Both, however, are equally capable of engendering a "transformative action" (Driver, 169).

Ritual and play are not eternally separated. They can and do conflate.<sup>7</sup> In such instances play can involve ritual, or ritual can contain play (162). One such instance is the trail ride. The rides are undertaken for playful or ludic purposes. For instance, Quinn Mortensen goes on trail rides "to get away from it all." He also enjoys trail rides in Moab because they give him a chance to "play on the slickrock."<sup>8</sup> Others like Charlie Copsey, Glenn Wakefield, and Ed Isaacson have concurred.

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<sup>7</sup> Drewel comments on the importance of play to culture and rituals (16-23).

<sup>8</sup> Slickrock is the name given to the sandstone around Moab by the enthusiast groups using it. These groups include, among others, Rock Crawlers, mountain bikers, and hikers. The stone is not really slick, but is like smooth cement, providing excellent tire traction. It is rumored that the name "slickrock" came from cowboys, whose horses' horseshoes could not get grip on the stone.



Ed calls many trail ride activities "horsing around." And indeed, the "high energy" and "imagination" commonly thought of as part and parcel of play are present during such sequences (Driver, 164).

Yet, this playful tone does not negate the purposefully transformational aspects ubiquitous to the rides. Drivers undertake rides to meet and be with "friends [from] all over the country" (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996). These experiences with others are intended to hone driving skills, and unite the group--thus changing the social dynamic. Often, trail rides become a forum for teaching neophytes the values and skills common to Rock Crawlers, drawing these individuals into the community. The rides, then, are consciously used as a means for transformation. The outback is an integral part of this process. Adults take their children along to, as one couple noted, "initiate" them into the "benefits of the wilderness" (1994 *Jeep Safari*). This couple continued, noting that they hoped time spent on trail rides, with others in the back country, would engender within their son a sense of morality, preventing him from "getting in with the wrong group...[and] using drugs."

These "cultural scenes" set the tone for the community, teach important values, induct new members, release tension, provide a creative performative output, and a host of other benefits (McCarl, 1993, 72). As such, trail rides should not only be seen as important secular rituals, but also as settings for profoundly important play. Readers should be aware that although the terms play and ritual are not regularly used throughout the course of this chapter, this discussion examines the trail ride experience in terms of a conflation of these two dynamics.

## PREPARATION

Rock Crawlers start "building" the outback as soon as they begin gathering before trail rides. This constructive process begins as participants "inscribe" their behaviors, language, indeed the entire event, with special meaning (Hufford, 8, 9). This activity begins physically in a parking lot (or wherever the group chooses to meet), then it moves to the different, spatially separated, trail ride location (Van Gennep, 18). Yet these two disparate locations are linked by a mental thread. For participants, the entire trip—from the club members' initial meeting until they separate to go home—is transformed into an experience conjuring the Other world known as the outback. Parking lot meetings begin to separate participants from the ordinary world, initiating them, as it were, into a state of readiness to enter the back country (Van Gennep, 23, 83).

Often groups or clubs assemble—prior to venturing into the back country—in the parking lot of a store, mall, bank, or some other location where they have room and freedom to congregate and socialize before proceeding to the trail (figs: 5.1, 5.2). Physically, this space is often located within the bounds of the ordinary world. Such locations are chosen for pragmatic reasons: they are easy to find and get to, and supplies for the day (food, auto parts, etc...) are readily accessible. People feel free to come and go between the gathered group and local stores while waiting to leave from such locations.

The *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* often converge before local rides in a large

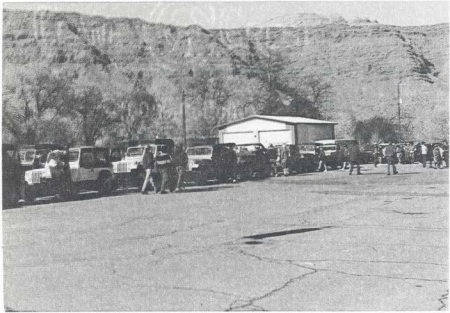


FIG: 5.1 Participants line-up their rigs and gather before a *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* trail ride.



FIG: 5.2 Participants gather to talk before a *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* trail ride begins.

parking lot situated between a bank and a *Wal-Mart*. This lot is handy because it is located downtown on State Street, a major road in American Fork, Utah, where the club is based. This spot is also highly visible from the street. People coming for the ride can easily spot the group. *Wal-Mart* also provides easy access for last minute food or basic auto parts purchases. People can also hang out and mill about.

During this time, people center their discussion on the outback. Language alters to help frame the back country experience (Bateson, 201-27). Pronouns change from "I" to "we," bringing the group dynamic into focus.<sup>9</sup> Conversation relates in terms of the trail ride experience. Participants "recast [outback] landscapes in terms of what [their 4x4s] can do [on] them" (Hufford, 1992, 82): "The sun's shining; warm slickrock gives more traction" (*Hell's Revenge* trail, Jeep Safari: 1996). Even the weather and physical environment are referred to in terms of what is expected to come: "We'll have a good day 'wheeling today; a little *cloud cover will keep things cool*" (*Steel Bender* trail ride, *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*: 1994, emphasis added). Stories about past trips, comments about new vehicles or modifications, and any other dialogue that turns community minds towards the imminent trip become a focus for attention.

When the group "moves out" towards the trail-head, or the beginning of the trail, they form a convoy which progresses along public roads. Ultra-low gearing often prevents many rigs from driving faster than a maximum of 60 mph. The C.B. radio banter is constant. Conversation fills the air waves and bristles with the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on language usage and conjuring "sacred" space, see: Mary Hufford, 1992, 42-5, 54-5.

drivers' anticipation. Participants ask questions about difficult spots on the trail: "Do you guys think I can handle this stuff" (Holly Neal, 8/31/1997)? Others ask who knows about a modification that they are thinking of doing to their rig: "How can I drop my low gearing without sacrificing my freeway speeds" (Brian Tanner, 9/1/1997)? Individuals are often harassed about mistakes they made during past trail rides, or characteristics by which they are known. Ed Isaacson was often hassled about an incident that occurred in the early 1990s when he attempted to help Gary Atkinson, who was caught in a precarious position. Ed's "help" placed Gary's troubled rig in an even more dangerous situation. Eventually the 4x4--and Gary--were brought to safety, but even two years later comments like, "Hey if someone gets hung-up don't forget to call Ed," could be heard on the C.B.

These playful ribs are meant to assert group acceptance of the individual "persecuted." Such humor helps to quickly promote a sense of community, which is imperative (Hufford, 1992, 51; Drewal, 19). Often trail rides cannot be successfully completed if the group does not work together. The banter is constant, and through discussions about the trails, vehicles, and past social interaction while on those trails, the three-way relationship experienced in the back country "materializes" (Hufford, 1992, 27). This relationship is:

participant>>>vehicle>>>landscape

Rock Crawlers "invoke, sustain, and interpret the [back country]. It is their attention to it that holds...[it] in being. When attention to it lapses...[it] vanishes" (8). Conversation thus centers on 4-wheeling and the landscape. As noted above, even comments about the weather are grounded through a back country perspective:

"Hey, it looks like it will be a great day to be on the rocks; there isn't a cloud in the sky," or "The rain last night is going to make the trail slick this morning." Topics that cannot in some way be made relevant to the outback experience are often avoided. If someone mentioned the work-a-day world, the spell transforming the outback might be broken (Huizinga, 21). It could slip back into the ordinary world: then participants would only be on a mere trail through some woods or the desert—not in "another world" (18). The importance of maintaining this dichotomy is imperative to outback stability (Caillois, 45).

Mary Hufford notes that C.B. handles used by foxhunters help to develop their hunting world by forging different personalities for the participants (1992, 45). This dynamic also exists among Rock Crawlers. Not all drivers have handles denoting different outback personas such as: Dr. Edward Isaacson, who is known as "Doc Ed," Quinn Mortensen, known as "Q," and Samurai owner Ken Francisco, who is called "Zuk," which is short for Suzuki. But C.B. behavior is often different from many drivers' normal personas. Quiet people may become "loud-mouths," commenting on anything and everything, while verbose people may be content to merely listen. Such contrasts highlight the alternate nature of the outback world.

The vehicles also progress through a metamorphosis as the trail head gets closer. This is difficult to recognize because rock crawler morphologies always allude to their potential as off-highway crawlers. Yet this promise is quickly realized as they are readied for the trail. "Lock 'n' low" is announced over the C.B. People get out of, and run around, their vehicles to lock the hubs\*. "Locking-in" the hubs

engages the front axle for 4-wheel drive. Many participants take this chance to see friends for one last minute before the ride, saying things like, "This is what it's all about folks" (Chip Brox, *Secret Spire* trail, 1996). Such statements hint that all auto modifications, the work-a-day rat race, indeed all life, culminates through the impending act of vehicle and driver upon the land.

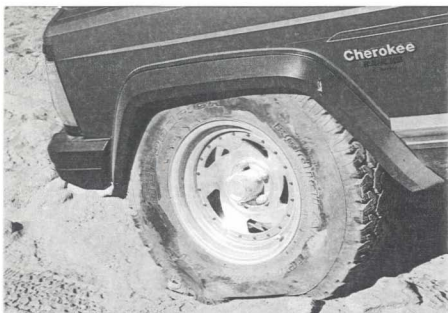
At this point, the air resounds with the metallic clunks and grinding noises of **transfer cases\*** being engaged into 4-wheel drive low-range.<sup>10</sup> Locked and in low, many rigs undergo one last change before they have shifted from being "daily drivers" (vehicles which are also used for ordinary world affairs), to machines in the element for which they were intended. This last change is "airing down," and entails letting the air out of one's tires. Airing down makes the tires softer and spongier. This provides more traction off-road (figs: 5.3, 5.4), increasing vehicular performance. A 4x4 properly aired down can achieve performance levels unequalled by even the same rig when its tires are fully aired.<sup>11</sup> Increased traction also ensures that tires are less likely to spin, thus avoiding possible trail damage—or damage to the tires themselves.

Allan Olsen "goes down to 12 pounds [of air per square inch]...It helps to conform the tire around the rocks. You're not hard-rubber spinning. It's just kind of

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<sup>10</sup> For more on "sounds of sport geography," see: Bale, 139-41.

<sup>11</sup> Airing down also provides a dramatically softer off-road ride and helps the tires to mould around rocks—instead of bouncing and skipping over them. This makes tires less prone to rock damage. People can air down as low as between 3 and 20 psi in the back, and 5 and 25 psi in the front. Several Samurai owners with whom I am familiar lower their air pressure to between 3 and 5 psi for proper off-road handling. Full-size trucks require more pressure.



**FIG: 5.3** This tire is aired down to improve traction as well as the comfort level of the ride. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)



**FIG: 5.4** An aired down tire conforms to the shape of the terrain, providing increased traction.



mushroom, marshmallowy, feeling around things. And it's more gentle on the terrain. And it's easier to drive" (4/12/1996). He notes how aired down tires react to the land: "Instead of your tire up [on top of] a 4 inch rock...When you let the air down you've got the 4 inches on top of the rock, plus however low the tire will wrap around the edges of the rock. So, you've got that much more traction gripping that rock" (4/12/1996). As the 4x4s are readied for the trail, the hissing sound of air escaping from the tires' valve stems adds to the chorus of other sounds made by drivers preparing to embark.

It is important to note the vehicles that are not daily drivers. Increasing numbers of people now tow their rigs to trail rides on trailers. Such rigs are highly specialized and are often no longer used as daily drivers (figs: 5.5, 5.6). They are not used daily for two primary reasons: (1) they are so heavily modified that they are no longer street-legal, or (2) they are modified specifically for rock crawling and are simply not owned for street use. Other rigs are trailered to the trail-head so that if they are broken while off-road they can be towed home and fixed later. The presence of these vehicles heightens the separation between the outback and the mundane worlds because they are intended only for this special place. Their mere presence intimates the existence of the extraordinary environment for which they are intended. Many do not even touch the "polluting" influences of city streets. They are, in effect, sacred machines for sacred space. These "are special [4x4s], protected, isolated, separated...apart from the mundane world: they [comprise] special properties" and modifications (Birrell, 357). Many such "sanctified" creations



FIG: 5.5 At the conclusion of the *Jeep Safari* a Toyota Land Cruiser sits on its trailer in downtown Moab.



FIG: 5.6 A Jeep sits on a trailer in a parking lot following the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*.

do not routinely experience the profane world, being carried above it on their platform trailers. They represent the ultimate separation between back country zones and their antithesis, the work-a-day world.

Such rigs also dramatize the importance the group places upon the outback, and their trips into this territory. Pulling these machines off their trailers is a ritualized event in which each act (pulling out the driving ramps, loosening the 4x4s tie-down straps, backing the rig off) brings the vehicle closer to its destiny as a rock crawler. People often gather to watch these 4x4s—referred to as “trailer queens”—being pulled onto, or off, their trailers.

In addition to the drivers, who liken all conversational topics to the back country, the vehicles add their low-gear whines, engine growls, and exhaust sounds and smells to the rhetoric. They “speak” of the impending communion as much as the individuals driving them. The group—participants and their rigs—now stands poised at the edge of the landscape designated as back country for the day’s event. Bounded and separated through these interactions, this zone is invoked by the people and in turn transforms them (Moore, 27).

The idea that people can create a space which in turn recreates them is not a new one. As part of a discussion concerning a turn of the century social dynamic engendered by Masonic Lodges, William D. Moore proposes that certain spaces exist as part of a dynamic that affects individuals entering them. He argues:

The lodge room and the members of the organization functioned within a dialectical relationship. The room had only the *significance assigned to it by the Masonic membership*; yet by being present within this space, which they had set aside as different, the individual members’ personal worth was elevated. The room was shaped and decorated

by the members of the lodge, but *it simultaneously transformed the men that inhabited it.* (27, emphasis added)

Moore also notes that the spaces created inside the Masonic Lodge imbue the members' lives with special meaning. This effect extends far beyond the walls of the lodge (27).

It may be argued that because the Masonic Lodge is a physically constructed environment the dynamic it engenders is different from that of the back country, which is "constructed" mentally. However, it is important to understand that although they are mental projections, the social reality of back country zones is as real as that of any physically constructed edifice (Tuan, 1975, 152).<sup>12</sup> Rock Crawlers venture within these bounds, and while there, engage in activities that are like the Masonic rites because they too are life-altering. Moore shows how the spaces within the walls of Masonic buildings created places where "Masonic thought was born," as well as locations where fraternity was created (27). Likewise, trail ride participants venture into wilderness spaces set aside for specialized activities that not only facilitate relaxation and escape, but define and perpetuate the community as well.

Perpetuating the community entails more than the initiation of new members; it involves the transmission of communally held ideals and values. This occurs through the event's "participatory" format, which then fosters the "transformational process" (Drewal, 15). In this aspect, trail rides, like other ritualized activities, cannot

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<sup>12</sup> Ryden has noted that "people tend to project their own feelings onto their physical surroundings" (66). This process is part of conjuring the outback because these spaces are created through the emotional "layers" "superimposed" upon the landscape (42, 50, 62).

be considered "unserious, frivolous and impotent;" rather, rules regulating participant action and interaction, and the reification of cultural values, imbue the atmosphere with seriousness which accompanies the lightheartedness and fun (15).<sup>13</sup>

## THE OUTBACK

Once within the outback, the trail ride displays an organization not readily visible in the morning pre-ride gatherings. In the parking lot a sense of unorganized pandemonium seems to rule; on the trail, uniformity reigns. For although the participants have come to have fun, it is not had at the expense of order. Rather, much of the pleasure inherent to the back country experience is due to the order instilled by traditional trail etiquette rules (Caillois, 44; Dunk, 66; Hughes, 95; Huizinga, 11). People not only abide by these behavioral tenets, but expect others to do so as well. To a great extent, it is the fulfilment of these rules that determines the success or failure of a trip.

Rock crawling is not about rules. Nevertheless, rules facilitate, bound, and order trail rides. Obedience is a main factor in the summoning and continuance of the outback. Serious etiquette breeches can rend the back country world, because they destroy its order. When the order is destroyed, the disorder—anarchy—of the

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<sup>13</sup> Huizinga similarly argues against the idea that play is the opposite of seriousness (5, 8).

ordinary world leaks in (Hufford, 1992, 48).<sup>14</sup> When this occurs, the community must work together to re-summon the outback. As will be discussed, this is accomplished by several means, including: informing the individual(s) of their breach in the hopes that they will reform their behavior, uniting as a group against the offending party, and/or ejecting those offensive persons from the group.

The idea of a rule-governed trip may fly in the face of stereotypical perceptions concerning the off-road experience. And many Rock Crawlers feel that those not familiar with their community assume that trail rides are undertaken to escape the order of society for the liberty to drive haphazardly, get wild, and party, in unpoliced mountain and desert expanses (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). For most Rock Crawlers such motivations could not be farther from the truth; and misunderstandings and misrepresentations irk them. Brian Isaacson lamented that "out of thirty years of rock crawling in Moab, the media only shows the drunk spring break college students that go down there. They aren't even Rock Crawlers" (6/17/1997).

Instead of venturing into the back country to party, Rock Crawlers enter these spaces to exit the ordinary world. Rather than anarchy, "inside the [outback] an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, *is* order" (Huizinga, 10). "Rules are inseparable from [trail rides]...they transform [them] into...instrument[s] of fecund and decisive culture. But a basic freedom is central to [the rides]...to stimulate distraction and fantasy"

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<sup>14</sup> Huizinga notes that "offense against the rules [can cause] a collapse of the play spirit, a sobering...disenchantment" (21).

(Caillios, 27). The outback, then, offers the chance to exist in a bounded world maintained through a set of rules ensuring a safe, ordered, society.<sup>15</sup>

"Crisis" situations follow the deliberate breach of these rules; Rock Crawlers "seek to retard the outbreak of open crisis [through following] elaborate rules of etiquette" (Victor Turner, 1991, 9). Off-road behavior tenets focus upon bringing the group together as a unit, driving one's vehicle responsibly, and having respect for the environment.<sup>16</sup> Adherence to these principles avoids crisis, and maintains back country order (Caillios, 8). Drivers are usually well aware of what constitutes good or bad "trail etiquette" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). As noted, basic concerns center upon proper group interaction, responsible vehicle use, and positive treatment of the landscape.<sup>17</sup> Following is a breakdown of the concerns in these three areas.

### APPROPRIATE GROUP INTERACTION

Rock Crawlers are specific when it comes to what makes good outback experiences. These judgements frequently center upon acceptable and unacceptable off-road behavior. Rock Crawlers often discuss what makes for good trail rides; statements recurrently list features they like about certain types of terrain.

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<sup>15</sup> We shall later see that the breach of the rules can engender heated emotions—from agitation to the extreme of possible violence. As will be discussed, such anger occurs because a break of conduct rules threatens to collapse outback borders.

<sup>16</sup> Birrell has discussed "rituals [as] rules of conduct" (357).

<sup>17</sup> For more on these rules, see: Nylund, 102-35.

But a major element of the outback experience is the quality of group interaction

(Bale, 130). Becci Neal notes:

Well, I enjoy being with friends. It's a lot of fun going with people you already know, or going with a group of people—some of whom you know just vaguely or you've been introduced to briefly, and getting to know them better as you pause on the trails and—you know—pause for lunch breaks. Or, waiting for the trucks to get through the difficult parts it's always fun to make new friends and to meet new people. (1/26/1997)

This friendship dynamic runs deeper than just making new friends. It is routinely asserted that members of the group must be willing to do whatever it takes to help each other through a trail.

During interviews Jim Broadbent answered all my questions about trail rides with the plural “we.” When I asked why he used “we” instead of “I,” he stated: “You’re not doing it alone...You’re participating with other individuals” (4/9/1996). Ed Isaacson detailed his favorite trail ride with a narrative commenting on the exceptional group dynamic occurring during that specific ride.

*Ed:* [Surprise Canyon] was the most fun. I think it had to do with the atmosphere. It's probably the hardest Jeeping in the shortest amount of time—we had seven vehicles, and it took us about six hours to go up the canyon. And you winch over—

*David:* —The canyon is less than a mile isn't it?

*Ed:* Yeah, it's less than a mile. And you're going up...about 12 hundred feet. And you're winching over seven or eight waterfalls. Really tough, tough, demanding, technical, hard, 4-wheeling. But it's so beautiful. And just the group we had, and just the excitement of it—I've never had *anything* like it! Then when we got to Panamint City [a ghost town at the top of the trail] we had a ball. We went up to all the old mining stuff...And then coming back down I was so scared and so hyped-up—but yet so excited. I haven't been that excited about something for years—and just had a ball...*And then that group—there*



*just was something about the group that was just—everybody got along perfectly. There wasn't a cross word. There wasn't a—and I broke an axle and had a horrible time getting out of there. Really a tough—a tough trip out. I had more trouble getting out than I did getting in. (4/16/1996, emphasis added)*

For Ed, this was the best back country experience that he has ever had. Despite the fact that he snapped one of his front axles and barely made it off the trail, this ride is remembered by him primarily for its superb group dynamic. In fact, Ed notes that he loved the ride so much that he “burned back to camp,” fixed his front axle, and was on another trail with the same group just hours later.

The important factor in creating this positive dynamic is a willingness to lose one's self within the group. Essentially, the “social” aspects of trail rides are assumed to be “inherent” to the outback experience (Miracle, 61). Trail rides:

*give us an opportunity to go out with people who enjoy doing the same things we do. Ninety percent of the people I've met, I've gotten along with extremely well. I've not met anyone I haven't liked in the club [Lone Peak]. But also...it's a very family-oriented club, it's very relaxing, a very comfortable feeling, you don't feel like it's a—any sort of competition when you're with the individuals. They are all very willing and eager to help one another. (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996)*

Sharing, friendly conversation, and a willingness to help each other—sometimes to the point of placing oneself in danger—these qualities are expected of trail ride participants (figs: 5.7, 5.8). Those reticent about rubbing elbows with others, while getting a rig unstuck, or while having a bite to eat at a lunch break, will likely be eschewed in favor of more communally minded participants. They are also at risk of being labelled an “ass hole,”<sup>18</sup> or someone who is known to be uncooperative.

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<sup>18</sup> This term describes an individual's outback etiquette and is not utilized in the same way as it would be used in situations outside of the rock crawling context.



FIG: 5.7 Fellow trail ride participants help Mark Milner as he descends *High Dive*. (Courtesy Mark Milner)

Well known Rock Crawler, Rick Russell, leads trail rides through some of Western America's most difficult trails. He also produces a series of "how to" videos. Drivers planning to run certain trails can watch the videos to learn what they need to bring on the trip, and what modifications their 4x4 needs, to competently negotiate the trail. Concerning group interaction on trails, Rick states:

The main job of [participants] is fairly easy. First, you need to harass every driver who goes through [a difficult section of trail]. Ask them how they made it this far or if they really have a drivers' license. And give them hell if they move any of the rocks. But if they need help, give it to them. And if they make it through, cheer them on. My best advice to the drivers: play along. Who knows, you may be the spectator someday. (*Rubicon Trail: Georgetown, California*)

His comments illustrate three significant points: (1) The importance of constant and



**FIG: 5.8** Participants help to push a Bronco up *Frenchie's Fin* on the *Fins 'N' Things* trail.

friendly verbal interaction. This interaction keeps the group in focus, rather than the individual. (2) Friendliness and humor keeps even the most serious situations manageable, and playful—not heavy or solemn (figs: 5.9-5.12). The verbal interaction between drivers and spectators breaks down divisions that might separate them (Hufford, 43, 53). Those drivers who get angry, or do not yell playful comments back to the crowd, are not playing their role to facilitate group unity. Likewise, spectators who yell personal attacks can collapse this unity. (3) When a

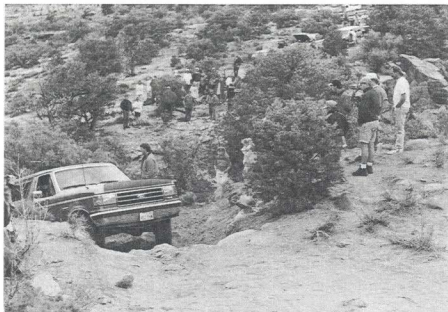
driver's safety is threatened, spectators should place the needs of this driver/vehicle first. This means "spotting" (directing) for the driver, pushing if s/he gets stuck, or vehicle extraction in the case of serious problems. Group members are expected to work as a unit to pass tests presented by the trail. Even children pitch in.

Russell's comments seem to intimate that drivers are not part of the audience dynamic; this is not so. They regularly leave their vehicles to watch others negotiate the difficult sections they have driven—or are about to drive. Consequently, they are expected to act as productive bystanders when they are part of that group.

But spectators are not the only ones with rules to follow.<sup>19</sup> Drivers must also consider the group. This means not attempting trails that are beyond driver or vehicle abilities. Such attempts slow down the group. During a 1992 *Jeep Safari* ride on *Seven Mile Rim* trail I witnessed many drivers lose their cool because one or two grossly under-equipped vehicles stretched a five hour trip to nearly seven hours. The under-equipped rigs struggled at every obstacle, and even in places not considered challenging. Due to the unprepared rigs, a large portion of the trail—including some of its noted obstacles—had to be by-passed to finish before dark. Groups unencumbered by such drivers avoid these hold-ups. During the 1996 *Jeep Safari*, the *Hell's Revenge* trail group comprised rigs that were so well prepared that the trail leader, Chris Stephens, added several miles of extra trail to the planned ride. Even with this added length the group still got home by the anticipated time.

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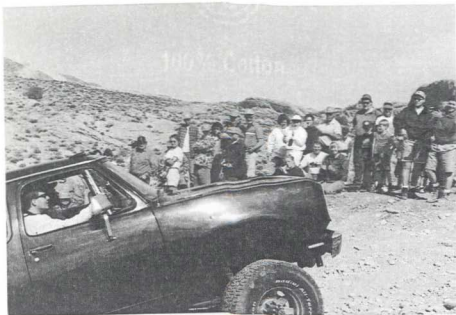
<sup>19</sup> It must be remembered that these people get back into the rigs until the next difficult section of trail. Here, drivers and passengers will once again leave their rigs to watch others in the group attempt the obstacle at hand.



**FIG: 5.9** A Bronco attempts the *Dragon's Tail*, while watched from the trailside by fellow participants.



**FIG: 5.10** Participants gathered at the ledge 3/4 up the *Dragon's Tail*, on the *Steel Bender* trail.



IG: 5.11 A group waits for a Dodge as it finishes its climb up *Potato Salad Hill* on *Hell's Revenge* trail.

FIG: 5.11 A group waits for a Dodge as it finishes its climb up *Potato Salad Hill* on *Hell's Revenge* trail.



FIG: 5.12 A crowd watches Gary Atkinson climb his Toyota up *Frenchie's Fin*, on *Fins 'N' Things* trail.

While in the outback continual movement is important. Maintaining the set schedule is equally as important. Thus, not spending too much time on a given obstacle is vital. Usually three tries per driver is acceptable; more than that only slows down the group. Besides, most drivers feel that "if you can't do it in the first three tries, you won't make it at all" (Dan Wynkoop, 4/1996). During the 1994 safari a driver noted that one individual was awful to have on trail rides and that he was not liked. He added that this individual took too much time on obstacles, ignoring the rest of the group as they waited for him. On one trail ride this bad driver repeatedly attempted an obstacle—without success—as a group of at least 40 vehicles waited.

Group physical unity must be maintained. One of the ultimate etiquette breeches is for the group to leave one of its members behind by accident: "You need to travel at the rate that the slowest vehicle is travelling at, because you need to stay together" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). Participants should never leave anyone on a trail.

At the beginning of the trails he leads, Chip Brox reminds drivers that the vehicle behind them should always remain visible in their rear-view mirror (1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, safaris). If drivers regularly monitor each other in this way, nobody will be stranded if their rig becomes disabled. If the vehicle behind a driver drops from view, that driver is responsible for waiting for the missing vehicle to catch-up. Or they must turn around and locate the errant rig. This also prompts drivers to keep up with the group ahead of them. Lagging or taking too much time on obstacles causes a disturbance in the group's cohesion (fig: 5.13).

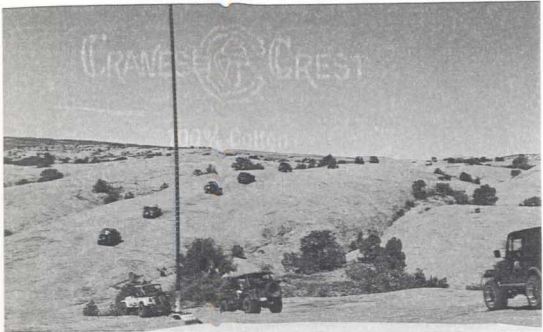


FIG: 5.13 Drivers keep each other in sight as they traverse a *Jeep Safari* trail. (Courtesy Ken Harrison)

Intoxication and the abuse of controlled substances are also an outback taboo. Some people see no problem with occasionally consuming a beer or two at lunch break; but more than one or two beers is seen as a serious breach. Control is a necessity in many off-road driving situations. If someone is not fit to drive on the street, they are not fit to drive off-road. Additionally, the family nature of these trips creates a dynamic not conducive to "partying." In his trail journal Ed Isaacson noted an instance during the 1992 *Jeep Safari* when a few drivers attempted to drive a trail while intoxicated:

Our trail was called *Fins and Things*, and our trail leader was Jean Akens, and the helpers were Tom and Terry Norman. Well right away we had problems, with a bunch of drunks called the [4x4 Climbers].<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The club name has been changed.



They wouldn't keep up and were obviously drinking and had a bunch of smart mouths on the C.B.

He then notes how trail ride participants rectified the situation: "Right away they were invited to leave, and basically dropped out and followed us some distance back."

Ed's account illustrates that abusing these substances while in the back country disturbs the group dynamic and is not tolerated. Many clubs, such as the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*, are formed for "family off-roading," and forbid any type of substance abuse in the club charter. The conspicuous absence of these substances is evident—even at many clubs' non-4-wheeling events. No *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* meetings involve alcohol. Likewise, no *Red Rock 4-Wheeler* events during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* serve intoxicating beverages.

Serious breeches to these rules are rare; when they do occur they are remembered. Luckily, it is the general lack of such negative behavior that brings groups together while in the outback. J.E. Malmberg, a neophyte Rock Crawler, was so enamored with her first back country experience that she wrote an editorial letter to a magazine that focuses on rock crawling. The letter articulated many of the ideals held by the community:

The camaraderie, fellowship and mutual support was something unexpected that developed over the many hours of shared challenges, fears and very occasional dirt-breathing. Togetherness is part and parcel of this pastime that very quickly becomes a passion for many of us who crave the old-fashioned notion of Good Clean Fun....It was at this point that the importance of mutual support really came home. For the experienced driver this comes as no surprise. Contrary to what most people think, four-wheeling is not a solo endeavor. Yes, it is only you and your vehicle inside the cab. The level of individual concentration is, to say the least, intense. However, outside that vehicle there's you, your leader, your spotter, your friends and all the

rest of those crazy folks who are just like you, ready to cheer you on, get you through, and pull you out if necessary. (20,22)

It is interesting that she refers to off-roading as "Good Clean Fun;" this seems to contrast what she considers to be healthy communal interaction on the trail with that occurring in the ordinary world. A belief that the back country is an escape from the negative factors in contemporary society underscores her comments. Malmberg is also keenly aware that a trail ride's "sacred" quality is contingent upon group interaction which is, in part, necessitated by the landscape's ruggedness.

Others have stated that one of the most important factors of 4-wheeling is having consideration and patience for one's fellow participants. Experienced drivers have an obligation to help those with less experience or less competently modified rigs (Ed Isaacson, 4/16/1996). Others reiterate the importance of "the people you meet, the camaraderie, the association, the social—I guess—interaction" in creating the outback (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996).

Chris Stephens—an experienced and well travelled Rock Crawler—noted that the worst trail he ever drove was the *Rubicon*. When pressed as to why the trail was so bad, his reply focused upon an unacceptable group dynamic. Those on this ride did nothing to help each other, and were cross with Chris and his wife, Tamara, because they did not drive the same vehicle make or model as the rest of the group.<sup>21</sup> The loathsome quality of the ride was not determined by the physical nature

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<sup>21</sup> Most clubs are based in certain locations. For instance, *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* are located in Moab, Utah, while the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* are based in American Fork, Utah. Other clubs are based upon vehicle make or model and do not depend as rigidly upon location; for instance, the *Early Bronco Registry* is a national club comprised solely of owners of 1966-1977 Ford Broncos. Likewise, the *Toyota Land Cruiser Association* is

of the trail or landscape; rather, it resulted from the negative attitudes and demeanor of his compatriots.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Chris made it clear that he would like to do the *Rubicon* again in the company of people who "don't have bad attitudes" (7/21/1994). In other words, each time a trail is run, it is, in a sense, a different space. A new creation. Topography and community combine on each trail ride to make that back country a separate context. These are often referred to and evaluated as discrete units. In that way Chris can say that the *Rubicon* is the worst trail he has ever run, yet be excited to drive it again.

Glenn Wakefield, of Park City, Utah, notes a similar means for evaluating the worth of trails. Glenn is an extreme driver, and describes himself as wanting to "push things to the edge in my recreational endeavors." When asked, "what makes a good trail?" he answered: "The company you are with. Mildly challenging trails with great company are as good or better than super technical trails with a bunch of jerks...But mainly the company you are with can make or break a trail" (10/24/1996). Glenn was quick to note that he rock crawls for the thrill, primarily driving the most difficult trails he can find; if he wants to "smell the flowers" he'll ride his mountain bike. But as he states above, even the most technically exciting trails can be ruined by a group that does not get along well.

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a club for Toyota Land Cruiser owners.

<sup>22</sup> This specific trail ride lacked the "groupness" needed to make the ride a success. In fact, at least one magazine took the opportunity to publicly chastise the club that sponsored the event because the Rock Crawling community was so outraged when rumors of the trip began to circulate. It was even stated that such behavior could crumble the foundations of the community.

Although having beautiful sights or a tough physical environment is important to the rock crawling experience, the quality of the landscape does not solely determine the worth of a trail ride. Rather, the positive conduct of one's fellow travellers adds to the beautiful territory. The quality of the topography is imperative, but even the most beautiful and challenging trail can be ruined by people who do not use proper trail ride etiquette. For Chris, the *Rubicon* topography is alluring enough that he is excited to run the trail again. However, *the trail* was not good on his initial trip because his comrades breeched the limits of acceptable back country manners.

### RESPONSIBLE VEHICLE USE

The second set of behavioral tenets focuses upon the driver/vehicle relationship. As machines specifically constructed to enter the outback world, rock crawlers are given extraordinary respect. They should never be abused. Readers may ask themselves how drivers avoid abusing vehicles while driving them off four foot cliffs and over boulder-strewn creek beds (figs: 5.14, 5.15)? Yet there are ways prescribed by the community for such conditions.

The term "graceful" has been used to describe how a 4x4 should be driven (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). "Basically the vehicle [should] be moving in a smooth, controlled, movement...not jerky or rough--something that would be, if you will, like a ballet dancer in some context. It looks like you have control as you go up over...thing[s]" (4/9/1996). "You need to think about the correct line to take and plan



FIG: 5.14 Ed Isaacson climbs *White Knuckle Hill* on the *Behind the Rocks* trail. (Courtesy Ed Isaacson)



FIG: 5.15 Charlie Copsey climbs a large ledge with his modified S-10 Blazer. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)

ahead" (McGee, 38).<sup>23</sup> Slow and controlled movements are less likely to damage vehicles: first, because rigs are less likely to lose traction while moving slowly; second, because a wildly bouncing rig is more apt to twist or break parts—like axles, motor mounts, hubs, or any number of other vital parts. Bouncing also leads to roll-overs. Rolling is a reality, and can happen to even the best drivers.

Tough terrain should be attempted with precision and control rather than a lead foot on the gas pedal. The slower one goes the better. In fact, slowness is a virtue many drivers now take to extremes. To put on a show for other participants drivers often traverse obstacles as slowly as possible.<sup>24</sup> Remember: nearly any vehicle can pass over rugged terrain if it is moving fast enough. However, the toll exacted upon vehicles speeding through rough terrain is a mighty one. An application of too much gas can lead to excessive tire-spin, which is also looked upon with consternation. Wildly spinning tires signify a driver using too much gas; this could cause the tires to rip as they spin on jagged rocks. Jim Broadbent notes that good drivers can respect their vehicles and the landscape, even while driving in difficult terrain. Readers should notice how the vehicle fits into the puzzle-like

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<sup>23</sup> Bale notes that many "sports involve the fitting of body movements into a context where they can more effectively evoke the satisfaction which comes from the successful strategic participation in the landscape" (123). Such comments accurately describe ideal outback driving.

<sup>24</sup> Because of the incredibly low gearing vehicles now have (many have gearing exceeding 100:1), crawl speeds can be so slow that motion is hardly perceptible. Such gearing is real show material.

nature of trail negotiation:<sup>25</sup>

*Basically you've got to be able to look at land formation or rock formation, and...pick what they call a "line" to go up it. In some way in your mind you visualize how that vehicle would go up that. It has to do with the...lay of the land, as well as the size of your vehicle...And so you kind of envision this thing mentally--and look at it from a couple different perspectives--whether you pick the line that you think would be the most--either the most challenging or the most do-able, depending on what you're trying to do there. So then, your ability to follow that mental picture and make it happen, and keep the vehicle moving, and not abusing the vehicle. It's easy to drive by power, but that's not what it's all about. (4/9/1996, emphasis added)*

Others similarly comment on the complex driver and rig unity that Rock Crawlers should feel.

*Even the best trail can be ruined for me--you know--you have people taking up and beating old vehicles and don't really have any idea of what they are doing...what does the magazine refer to them as: "low-class yahoo Jeepsers with little regard for personal safety or vehicle whatsoever." (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996)*

Little respect is generally given to drivers who do not share an intimacy with their rig. These drivers are often dangerous to be around because of their erratic control. In fact, the negative stigma attached to such individuals has a name; they are referred to as "ya-hoos." This title, often used synonymously with "red neck" or "ass-hole," designates a socially offensive standing in the community. Luckily, there are few drivers of this type. But as noted above, one bad apple can spoil the whole bin. Their bad driving can result in a ruined trail ride, or even lost trail access privileges for the community in the future.

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<sup>25</sup> Gerald L. Pocius notes that "landscape provides a puzzle that will never be solved, and therefore a topic for endless discussion" (1991, 90). Like this "endless discussion" Rock Crawlers repeatedly return to the back country to solve the physical riddles it poses.

Rock Crawlers react negatively to those who "beat on" their rigs because it is assumed that there should be a vehicle/driver unity. "Within the [outback] the self of the [driver] is an expanded self that incorporates [one's rig]. Taking on his [back country] persona, a [driver] projects himself into a [trail ride] via his [4x4]" (Hufford, 1992, 51). I have already noted the propensity for Rock Crawlers to see their vehicles as extensions of their bodies.<sup>26</sup> In fact, "in the [back country], the minimum unit is a [driver] plus his [vehicle]" (53). This dynamic is evidenced by the regular usage of the same definition—rock crawler—for one's vehicle and for oneself.

This unity is further revealed by drivers' propensity to refer to the combination of themselves and their 4x4s as "I." This is not a slip of the tongue, it emphasizes the self expansion that drivers experience.<sup>27</sup> This unity is created by the intimate knowledge that comes from having created one's rig, and driven it extensively off-road while being sensitive to every movement, sound, and flex while driving. Driving is, in this aspect, a sensuous experience. Drivers "feel" the trail via their vehicle. Chris Stephens has discussed a sensation of "walking" as he drives his Jeep along trails. He notes that one's unity with a vehicle is not a constant. It fluctuates; some days a driver will be in better sync with their rig than others (7/1994).

4x4s are tools for traversing the back country, they are also extensions and expressions of self. With this basic understanding of the unity between driver and 4x4, it is not hard to imagine the implications of abusing one's rig. Self abuse,

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the expanded "pronoun [used] to refer indiscriminately to the [vehicle] and to the [driver]," see: Bale, 123.



violence, lack of responsibility, and low self worth are all images used to define those who "beat on" their rock crawlers. The term "masochist" has even been used to describe such drivers. Unnecessarily "trashing" one's rig is the ultimate sign of irresponsibility and immaturity.

During the 1994 *Jeep Safari*, a driver consistently abused his vehicle while negotiating a tough trail. To make it climb a ruggedly steep and rocky incline called *Potato Salad Hill* he took a run at speeds that were reported to be in excess of 15 to 20 mph (fig: 5.16). At a location on another trail he ran his rig across a crack (*the Golden Crack*) at an angle known to be dangerous. By the end of the ride, his truck had a shattered windshield and a bashed-in body. Both had occurred from the 4x4 being "laid over"<sup>28</sup> during the ride. Such accidents infrequently happen to drivers; however, rugged terrain sporadically does take its toll. Yet this damage had resulted from the driver's "win at all cost" attitude. He was the talk of the 1994 event and people eschewed his company. He was labelled "Crazy Joe,"<sup>29</sup> as rumors circulated about his unacceptable driving style. Some people were angry and did not want him to take part in any other trail rides. They felt that he did not add a positive note to the rides he drove; his negative example was not good either. Two years after the incident, people still talked about his hijinks. In 1996 his driving was reported to be less erratic, but it was still not tolerable.

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<sup>28</sup> Laying-over a rig refers to a partial roll-over. The vehicle rolls onto its side, but does not go all the way onto its roof.

<sup>29</sup> His name has been changed to protect his identity.



**FIG: 5.16** "Crazy Joe" careens up *Potato Salad Hill*, on the *Hell's Revenge* trail. Minutes later he rolled his 4x4 in a second--"at least 40 miles-per-hour"--attempt (Mark Milner, 1/24/1998). (Courtesy Mark Milner)

## RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Respecting the outback environment is a primary concern for Rock Crawlers and socializing generally focuses upon group interaction with the landscape. Participants discuss how challenges can be negotiated without harming the trails. Respecting the landscape is bound tightly with retaining the right to continue using the outback. Drivers are well aware that abusing trails or the land surrounding them can lead to trail closures by the government or private land owners. Consequently, rules have been adopted that regulate the driving habits of those entering the outback. These tenets concerning back country treatment are called "treading

lightly." Although *Tread Lightly!* has been discussed previously,<sup>30</sup> it is important to focus upon the movement again in terms of its affect on the trail riding experience.

Besides regulating driving habits, this code additionally mandates that drivers not only refrain from littering, but that they also pick up any trash left by others. The volume at which people play their stereos is even an issue. Booming stereos, although installed in some rigs, should not be played loud. Excessive volumes not only drown out the sound of a vehicle's engine—hearing one's engine is important to monitoring vehicle performance—but it scares away local fauna and makes conversation difficult.

Chip Brox, as well as the other trail leaders at the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, believe responsible off-road behavior is imperative to maintaining back country landscapes. Hence, Chip gives a "treading lightly" lecture during the lunch break of every trail ride he leads (*Jeep Safaris*: 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996). He reminds participants that responsible care not only assists in conjuring the outback, but helps the community keep the legal right to use these public lands.

I think that we have to teach people in all aspects of off-road and off-site use of the land—whether it be mountain biking, whether it be Jeeping, whether it be hiking, backpacking—proper and rightful use of the desert-country of south-east Utah. That's very important. We have to teach people how to use the country. And if we do that, the next generation and the next generation of off-road 4-wheel enthusiasts will have the same rights and privileges that we do. If we don't do that, that privilege and right is going to be taken away from us. So its very important...that we educate people to take care of the public lands. (Chip Brox, 4/7/1996)

Question and answer sessions encourage participants to ask questions and add

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter two.

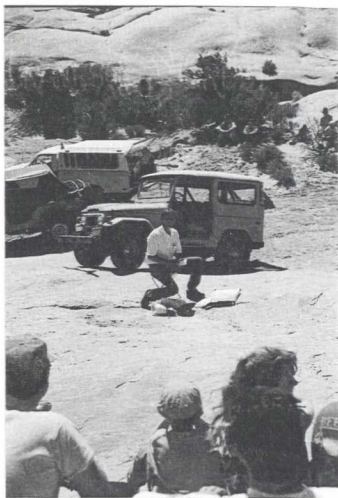
their own views to the conversation. Conversations are aimed at including all present within the care-for-the-land dynamic. Children, too, are encouraged to ask questions in many of these conversations.

Chip reminds new drivers, as well as seasoned veterans, that keeping the land pristine is their responsibility. This responsibility entails “packing out what you pack in,” and goes beyond merely picking up trash (Chip Brox, 1996 *Jeep Safari*). It means packing out your body’s solid waste. The effect exacted upon the desert’s fragile ecological balance by large groups can be dangerous, so doing all possible to lessen this risk is each driver’s responsibility. Chip comically sits on the trail ride’s official “porta-potty” as he speaks,<sup>31</sup> thus creating a light and joking atmosphere (fig. 5.17). In this way, a topic of extreme importance to the community can be discussed in a relaxed format.

The outback experience, then, involves conquering the landscape without leaving a trace. Most rules for off-road driving focus upon this ideal. Consequently, many individuals cannot understand why people outside the community persist in the belief that Rock Crawlers destroy the back country landscapes. Often, Rock Crawlers—trying to elucidate this problem—give elaborate accounts of positive promotion and activities regarding land use. These accounts detail their own eco-friendly behavior, and even *Tread Lightly!*’s work with auto manufacturers and auto-oriented magazines:

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<sup>31</sup> Each trail leader in the *Jeep Safari* carries a porta-potty for attendees to use while in the outback.



**FIG: 5.17** Chip Brox sits on a porta-potty during a *Tread Lightly!* lecture on the *Secret Spire* trail.

I have a membership [to *Tread Lightly!*]...not because I feel a strong urge to be philanthropic with my money, but because I support—and want others who see my wild looking vehicle—to know that I support taking care of the environment. My *Tread Lightly!* sticker sits right next to my *IMBA* sticker on the back window. I get really bugged with people that leave garbage and/or various kinds of trash on the trails. I really get bugged with gun owners that go out on forest roads, shoot-up everything, and leave their gun trash laying around. Gun trash means empty shells and cartridges. I was on *Rubicon* [trail] last

year and saw some guys pulling down a dead tree for firewood. This tree really added to the scenic nature of the meadow in which we stood. I was really disappointed.

None of my friends 'wheel; they think that 4x4 guys are all beer-swilling yahoos that drive into the mountains and leave their shit everywhere. That is because all they see is the trash left over by the one or two jerkoffs that fit that bill...not the hundreds of others that have passed through cleanly. There is a general misconception out there about who we are...but on the other hand...there are still a lot of guys that could care less about the environment, and tear it up. At least *Tread Lightly!* gets us into the media and hopefully into the political arena where we can show that most of us are responsible, and want to keep the environment intact while still maintaining trail access. (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996)

As is evident from this statement, drivers have strong opinions when it comes to how the outback should be treated—and how others think it is treated by Rock Crawlers.

These opinions generate anger when these frustrated people catch others mistreating these landscapes, or hear people hastily generalizing about all off-roaders, based upon the actions of a few individuals. There is no better way to anger Rock Crawlers than to tell them that their activities destroy the landscape.

Several members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* were discussing stereotypical images of Rock Crawlers. One individual noted that people see their highly modified 4x4s, and assume the rigs are driven "hell-bent over the terrain." Charlie Copsey vehemently replied: "Half the reason we build [rigs] up is so we won't rip up the land." Others often touch upon the "leave no trace" concept: "There's a lot of areas that I've gone across, and walked back, and you cannot *tell*—other than that you are on dirt—that the vehicles have passed there. And that's the way it should be. The last thing you need is these two-lane ruts travelling all over the country" (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996).

The most important aspects of treading lightly, then, are those that concern one's driving habits. After all, the vehicles offer the greatest potential for damage. And damage to the trails ruins them by lessening the illusion of a pristine landscape. This also provides ammunition for groups with a goal to close back country areas to vehicle access. Consequently, driving slowly is once again an important issue. Slow driving—known as “crawling” or “rock surfing” to the group—not only keeps one's 4x4 from being damaged by the terrain, but keeps the 4x4 from damaging the terrain. Tires rotating slowly, pulling a rig up and over rocks, will not create damage like four wildly spinning ones.

Another important aspect of driving is not “blazing trails.” Blazing a trail refers to driving one's rig off the established trail. Such behavior is thought of as inexcusable; drivers are expected to keep to the existing trails. Rarely do serious Rock Crawlers breach this rule; if someone does, they are immediately chastised. On the *Fins 'N' Things* trail, during the 1994 *Jeep Safari*, a group of teen-age boys in a Jeep careened off the trail and through 40 or 50 feet of desert vegetation. The C.B. was immediately jammed with a torrent of comments aimed at the driver. He was informed in no uncertain terms that such behavior was unacceptable and that if it continued he would be expelled from the group.

Thus, many Rock Crawlers not only try to care for the outback environment, but also consider themselves environmentalists:

I very definitely believe that I am an environmentalist. I love the outdoors—all aspects of the outdoors: hunting fishing, 4-wheeling, as much or more than anybody else. And so right off the bat, I think that people that I like to associate with—you see on the trail—are those who practice *responsible* land use and land management. And you know,

that goes beyond packing out your trash...It means that I don't like to see people who are doing things like "high marking"--for example--on hills. You know, "let's see how high up [the hill] I can get my tracks and ruts." Or, the people that tear-up the land. Hey, believe me, I love climbing. But you know, there are certain times when you just don't go running pell mell over bushes--or make tracks and things like that. We try to stay on the trails and roads that have been established for our recreational activity. We try not to blaze new trails. (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996)

It is important to note that the above comments concerning responsible land use are couched in terms of communal dynamics. The remarks begin with commentaries on the speakers' environmentalist tendencies, then shift to focus upon social interaction with each other and with the physical environment.

Caring for the land is a sensitive point for Quinn Mortensen; he is one of the most conscientious drivers that I have met. He also considers himself to be ecologically minded. And like others in the community, he shuns driving through trails that are not ecologically sound. When discussing important aspects of treading lightly, Quinn begins by addressing when and where to drive in the back country:

I view it as not only staying on a designated trail, but avoiding damaging the existing trail...If I come upon mud, I avoid going through it at any high speeds. And if I can, I avoid it all-together. That's how you get the really bad ruts in the road--things like that. Which, as soon as you get a rut, that channels the water--which is going to cause more erosion through that area. (4/21/1996)

Although Quinn specifically addresses muddy trails, he points out that it is not acceptable to drive one's rig over land that is in a fragile state. It is expected that at such locations drivers will skirt the problem, avoiding the possibility of making a bad situation worse. This means that during parts of the year, or during certain weather conditions, driving may be unacceptable on some trails.



Rock Crawlers are aware of their potential effect(s) upon the land. And contrary to what they see as a stereotyped image, most consider themselves to be ecologically minded.<sup>32</sup> Because the outback provides the haven into which they journey, it is important that possible problem-causing incidents be avoided.

The key thing...is keeping the existing trails in their pristine condition. Don't do anything that is going to damage the trails—that's going to make it so the *Forestry Service* says, "Well this trail has gotten to the point to where it is *causing erosion* which is putting silt into the stream bed, which is hurting the fish and wildlife of the area. So we *have to close this trail down*." If we take care when we are off-roading then we won't have a problem. (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996)

Quinn is a good example; he eschews back country trips with individuals known to drive in a violent or disrespectful nature. Many Rock Crawlers have noted that there seem to be a growing number of people drawn to the sport who do not adhere to its social constructs. They seem to be enamored with the extreme driving and neglect the social aspects which are assumed by most Rock Crawlers to go along with this driving. Primary offenses of this nature are drivers who do not respect the land, or their rigs. They "needlessly spin their tires," drive in inappropriate locations, and "hammer their rigs on the rocks" (David Jarvis, 9/16/1998). Quinn has little patience for such drivers and routinely claims that they do not make good driving companions.

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<sup>32</sup> Many who call themselves "ecologically" minded will preface the term with some form of disclaimer so as not to seem like the "eco-freaks" (folk within activist groups) that appear on the news. To most Rock Crawlers, these individuals are zealots with little regard for anything but their own ego-centered goals. They are viewed with loathing and anger.

## A TRAIL ETIQUETTE BREECH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

At the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* buzzed about a shocking "incident" that occurred during a trail ride (Ed Isaacson, 4/16/1996). Days later, tempers still rose when the group got together and discussed it. It was viewed by many as the worst violation of trail manners they had ever witnessed. Several people in the group adamantly expressed the intention to avoid the *Jeep Safari* in the future; they believed the safari was being over-run by people from outside the Rock Crawling community who did not share "our values." Others questioned the future quality of "our community" if "these people" and their offensive behavior could even exist within group bounds. Ed Isaacson, who witnessed the incident, recalled it:

When *that* occurred, we were out on the *Behind the Rocks* area [F map 2]—on a trail, behind the leader which was a guy from *Red Rock [4-Wheelers]*—the *official* leader. And the [offending] group was coming in the opposite direction up the hill...and that's a very narrow area—not much room to get around. There are some big slickrock spots that you could stop and get out of the way if you wanted to. So it's not like it's a narrow track that you *can't* get around or *can't* get through. But what we were doing is going down, making slow progress, we had a big group—a lot of novice 4-wheelers—that were making really slow progress.

And a group from—well the only license plate I saw was Arkansas, but it's a bunch of guys that have been in a bunch of magazines, that are *very* well known. I recognised two different rigs that I'd seen previously in *4-Wheeler* [magazine], and *4 Wheel Drive & Sport Utility* [magazine], both. And they just *flat-out* drove right through the center of the group, basically held our group up. Somebody in our group got out and mouthed-off at them, and told them off—you know, get out of the way—to let us through. And so they just proceeded to drive out through the boonies—out through the sage brush—out through the micro-biotic crust and all that stuff they talk

about...And just tore the place up. And as we went *by*, mouthed-off and flipped us off, and very belligerent, and very uncouth. And, we had ladies with us and there was some bad language. And it was just a real unpleasant, real ugly scene.

And the part of it that probably upset me the most—it wasn't so much, you know the *Tread Lightly!* part of it that upset me the most...[it] was that there was a lot of novice 4-wheelers that had *never* been out before. We talked to two or three of the groups—there was one guy from Illinois, it was his first trip to Utah, his first trip on an organized run—and it was an *UGLY* scene. And he was upset. He was really unhappy. And it just presented a really bad image of what the sport of 4-wheeling could be if people don't take care of it. And the guys that confronted [the offending group], and talked to them about it—finally backed off or I think they probably would have been assaulted. I think they would have got—they probably would have duked it out with the guys...

But it was—there were two big factors: it was an organized group and they came through the group! 'Didn't give us the right-of-way. And then, they were just, *very obviously off the trail* and out in the boonies, and doing things that were not in harmony *at all* with the *Tread Lightly!* concept. And then, they were very rude and belligerent, ignorant, and just presented a very, very, poor image. Really Bad. (4/16/1996)

It should be noted that the offending group transgressed two of the three outback behavior tenets: respect for others, and respect for the environment. It is no wonder that Ed's group reacted vehemently, this was a double offense. Discussing this incident in-depth will help readers understand why this incident was so offensive.

The offence began when the trouble-makers broke the sense of community. This violation originated when the offending group did not give the right-of-way. When groups meet off-road, the right-of-way is nearly always given to the larger group, or in special cases it is relinquished to the group that cannot easily yield right-of-way:

I think that in terms of group rides, there are some common courtesies that need to be observed. You know, that has to do with right-of-way for vehicles. Even very simple things like not crowding individuals that are trying to go over obstacles, being aware of who's in front of you and who's behind you at all times. It's a lot like table manners, but it's things that we do out...on the trail. (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996)

When someone is coming the other way...if I'm near a place where it's easy to pull off without damaging the wildlife or anything like that, then I'll pull over and wait for them to come by...Probably 90 percent of the time, maybe even more than that, the people coming the other way--usually you know--wave "Hi" and maybe say a greeting to each other. (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996)

During the *Jeep Safari*, official trail rides *always* take precedence over other groups using the trails. This means that official rides *always* get right-of-way. This meeting began with the offending group breaking all three of these tenets: they were a smaller group; they were in a position to more easily yield right-of-way; and they were not an official *Jeep Safari* trail ride--a point Ed makes very clear.

Rather than moving to the trail sides, the offending group violated the sense of community again by driving through Ed's group. This act flies directly in the face of off-road hospitality. The official, safari sponsored, 4x4s have now been forced off the trail wherever they can find a spot. Not only has the larger group's sequence been destroyed but its physical cohesion is also ruined. One of the most agitating aspects of this second offence is that by this time drivers realize the incident is no simple misunderstanding. Ed mentions that the offending drivers are well known--having been featured in magazine articles and having run trails regularly in the area. Not only is their lack of respect overt, but they flaunt it in the faces of the larger group by verbally abusing those individuals who voice outrage at their actions.

Ed makes it clear that the situation is worsened because neophyte drivers are

present. The community tries to initiate new drivers into good off-road habits by teaching proper etiquette during gatherings like the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*, *Sierra Trek*, the *Dakota Challenge*, and others. This means providing examples of what should, and should not, be done while on trails. Many drivers go out of their way to make sure newcomers understand what is expected of them. In *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers'* meetings, proper etiquette has been the object of discussions aimed towards newcomers (1994 club meetings). The good examples for neophytes during this trail ride have now been undone in a few moments. The "best face" has been ruined. This instance, according to Ed, upset many newcomers, some of whom travelled great distances to attend the safari.

The second wave of offence comes after the trouble-makers have driven through Ed's group. They take their rigs off the trail. For the experienced drivers that they are, this is an especially offensive act. Not only are they tearing-up the landscape, but they are destroying the micro-biotic crust (also known as the cryptobiotic soil crust). This soil is "dominated by cyanobacteria, and also include[s] soil lichens, mosses, green algae, microfungi and bacteria. These crusts play an important role in the ecosystems in which they occur" (*National Park Service* pamphlet). This thin algae-like black shell forms over desert sand, keeping it from blowing in the wind. Additionally, "when moistened, [it] swell[s] up to ten times [its] dry size. This ability to intercept and store water benefits" the other plant life in the desert (*National Park Service* pamphlet).

Information about this important form of life is well publicised during the safari;

it can be found in trail leader comments (during trail rides) and within articles in the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Easter Jeep Safari* magazine. Drivers are made aware that driving over this bio-formation kills it; and crust re-growth takes "up to 50 years" (*National Park Service* pamphlet). They are also aware that a destroyed area is open to wind erosion for those re-growth years.

Such harm also endangers the future of 4-wheeling in the affected areas because the government closes damaged locations to driving so they can "heal" themselves. It is no wonder that Ed's group reacted strongly. Not only was a moral code broken and flaunted in their faces, the offenders then acted in a way that endangered the possibility of future excursions into this back country area.

### ENFORCING THE RULES

Examining how the community enforces behavior codes furthers an understanding of how Rock Crawlers view the back country landscapes--and how those landscapes affect communal interaction (Hughes, 103; Dunk, 67). The ways in which rules are enforced is equally telling:

When [participants] are accused of inappropriate conduct and must defend or excuse their actions, or when [participants] stop play to fight over the finer points of what did or did not happen in a particular exchange, they *provide a window* on their own interpretations of actions and events, and on the processes by which they collectively negotiate and renegotiate those interpretations as new circumstances arise. (Hughes, 103, emphasis added)

The "window" is an understanding of communal attitudes arising from a

consideration of how that community chooses to enforce or overlook specific infractions to the play code. For instance, when the troublemakers cut through the safari group and then veered through the desert, it offended those on Ed Isaacson's trail ride.

Neophyte drivers who unwittingly navigate their rigs off the trail may, however, not engender such a response. Rather, members of the community take them aside to tell them the nature of their mistake—and not to do it again. Likewise, if an individual or 4x4 were in some form of trouble, members of the group might have to travel off the trail to offer help. It is important to note that they would do all possible to minimize their impact on the terrain. The community tempers its response to a given act, based upon the context (Hughes, 95-6, 98). Driver attitude and membership level within the community are also taken into account. There was no leeway given in Ed's "incident" because the offending drivers were known to be experienced.<sup>33</sup>

Responses to such actions, then, are based upon more than just a list of rules. They are based, in part, upon the knowledge level the offending individuals are thought to possess. In this way the canon of etiquette also reflects how the group sees itself (Hughes, 95). In other words, when a neophyte unwittingly breaks the rules, the breach is turned into a situation where the offender can be instructed

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<sup>33</sup> Many people in the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* could not make sense of this altercation. Hence, most dismissed this threat to their world view by stating that the offenders "aren't really Rock Crawlers, they're just yahoo 4-wheelers." Such comments move the offensive people—and therefore their acts—outside of the community; this maintains and protects Rock Crawler morals and identity that should be held by all.

as to what the group "is," what the land represents, or how to act while in the outback. However, if an accomplished driver makes a similar transgression, participants realize the driver may be consciously violating the group's self-image. As Ed has detailed, the group reacts accordingly.

There are several strategies for enforcing these rules: taking the offender aside to notify them of their problem, verbal abuse, gossip, verbal ejection, and in extreme cases ostracism.<sup>34</sup> As noted, when someone does something deemed unacceptable they might be told that their behavior is seen as such. Such enforcement is usually reserved for new participants.

Another, more public, way to notify someone about their problematic behavior is verbal abuse. This occurred on *Fins 'N Things* trail when a group of teenagers veered from the trail. The teens were told in no uncertain terms—via the C.B.—that their behavior was not appreciated. They were called several choice names: "stop being an ass hole," "get your piece of shit back on the trail." These, and other comments, were included in the verbal barrage aimed at them over the C.B. The C.B., a public forum, is used for such comments. The group unites in this "community space" against the offender(s) who hear comments directed at them, not from individuals, but from an undifferentiated group voice. The anonymous statements, as it were, represent the feelings of the group as a whole. Thus, group unity is maintained against the offending individual(s) (Hughes, 101).

Bad behavior also engenders gossip. Gossiping provides chances to further

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<sup>34</sup> Dunk discusses similar rule enforcement in slow-pitch softball games (70-74).



unite the participants, letting the offender know that his/her behavior is outside the parameters of normal back country decency. During a trail ride in 1992 I was talking with Brian Gerk; as a large 4x4 drove by, he muttered: "that guy's an ass hole." I asked why, and received a list of the offences committed by this driver and a few of his comrades. We conferred upon how such behavior was detrimental to "the group." When enough people are engaged in gossiping about the negative behavior of a driver, rougher measures may be deemed necessary to curb such instances.

In the case of seriously offensive drivers, the group may band together to engage in what I label "verbal ejection." Verbal ejection is when participants tacitly acknowledge that an individual is no longer fit to remain with the group. At this point, the trailside banter normally used to include drivers within the gathering is turned against them. For instance, as valued drivers proceed through a difficult physical environment, it is normal to playfully tease the individual, while helping them in any way they may need. Chides and remarks yelled to drivers from the trail sides let them know they are valued by the community. This dynamic is inverted against offensive drivers, when the yelled remarks are aimed at urging them to attempt feats which could disable their 4x4.

This activity helps the group to display its unity against the offensive member, while also contributing to the destruction of his/her rig. Disabling the rig leads to the driver's inevitable ejection from the group because when the vehicle is broken, it cannot proceed. Instead of offering help to the broken-down driver, s/he is left to be towed out by the "tail gunner." (Tail gunners are trail rides' final drivers, and are assigned before-hand to help broken-down rigs off the trail.) By uniting against the

offensive individual, the group displays its unity and protects group cohesion.<sup>35</sup>

During a *Jeep Safari* ride on *Gold Bar Rim* trail in 1993, a Toyota pick-up loaded with obnoxious individuals was offending other participants on the ride with foul language and poor driving etiquette. Just before lunch a large ledge loomed in the trail. Only the best 4x4s attempted the obstacle. When the Toyota driver edged up to the ledge, people whispered: "I hope he **grenades**\* something," and "what an idiot, he'll never make it." Suddenly the group came alive, egging the driver on with comments: "you can do it, use more gas," "hit it harder next time, you can make it." Repeatedly the driver hammered his truck against the ledge, eventually shattering his transmission. As participants helped to roll the damaged 4x4 from the obstacle, blue smoke billowing from under its body, people walked away laughing: "What an idiot!"

According to Kevin Perry, a similar instance occurred on the *Hell's Revenge* trail several years later. Kevin noted that the offensive driver was "some spoiled rich kid with a brand new Toyota 4-Runner that his...father probably bought him" (9/13/1997). Kevin added that the driver "hammered his rig on every obstacle" he encountered, showing no respect for the "brand new truck." After participants on the trail ride watched the driver repeatedly hammer his 4x4 against steep trail ledges, messages aimed at him were soon aired over the C.B.

People were saying, "Hey, hit it a little harder and you'll make it"...I was behind him and I'd see that the worst route up something would be to the right; so, I'd say, "Hey, go over to the right, go waaaaay over

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<sup>35</sup> It must be noted that the offensive driver is not left in the outback alone. They still have the help of the tail gunner, but *are* effectively ejected from the group.

to the right! <<Laughing>> And we'd watch him go up and bash his bumper and rockers....By the end of the ride he did at least five-thousand dollars worth of damage to that new 4-Runner! (Kevin Perry, 9/13/1997).<sup>36</sup>

Such rhetoric—which is normally inclusive—is turned against only the most offensive drivers. These people are wholly unaware that the trailside rhetoric is being used to exclude them instead of include them, emphasizing their lack of unity with the group. If these drivers heed group advice and hit the obstacles harder, it also signals a lack of unity with their rig. Occasionally a driver realizes what is occurring and backs away from the obstacle. Realizing the group's exclusionary goal, s/he will often amend the offensive behavior, and may attempt penance to the group: such as being extra friendly or going out of the way to help someone in need. If the driver is perceived to be repentant, group members may begin a reconciliation process.

A final means of ejecting offensive participants is to have the trail leader tell them to leave. I have witnessed this only once. During the 1994 safari, a Jeep full of young males was allowed to follow along with our group because they had missed the trail ride for which they had been properly registered. Not long into the trail ride they became inebriated. This offence was compounded by their driving off the trail, blasting music at high volumes, and yelling obscenities over the C.B. Finally, they were told by the trail leader, Jean Akens, to leave. She noted their license plate so that they would not be officially admitted to a safari trail ride in the following years.

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<sup>36</sup> Kevin is qualified to guess at the monetary damage to the 4x4 because he owns his own auto paint and body business.

In similar cases hosted by other clubs, such as *Lone Peak*, individuals can be asked to leave, or when their annual membership expires they will not be allowed to renew.

### OUTBACK FUN

The outback, however, is not about rules. It is about excitement, play, fun, relaxation, escape, and spending “quality time” with one’s family and friends. When people venture into its expanses, outside stresses and pressures melt away. “Probably the main thing [is] that I enjoy being away from large populations of people, being out in areas that you usually don’t see, where you’re getting back with nature (Quinn Mortensen, 4/21/1996). Participants enjoy experiences with their clubs because of the communal feelings engendered during the rides: “It [is] just an enjoyable way to go out with friends and enjoy the outdoors, as well—you know—go camping and do a lot of fun things we enjoy” (Becci Neal, 2/26/1997). Part of this fun is exploring trails together as a group, helping each other through difficulties, and taking pleasure in being with others that have common interests.

Ed Isaacson details his first time climbing the 15 to 20 foot waterfalls on the *Surprise Canyon* trail, emphasizing the joy drivers take in working with close friends while in pictorial settings:

The vegetation was lush and in many places was overgrowing the trail. I was as nervous as a mouse in a cat’s house, and from the chatter on the CBs it was obvious that there was some real excitement in the air. Chris [Stephens] was first up [the waterfall] and showed us how it was done, with great care in attaching securely to the winching point and then showing us expertly how to keep the cable tight, and

pretty soon it was my turn. HOLY COW!!! My foot was shaking so bad I could barely keep it on the clutch, but with a lot of help from my friends I made it up the first fall, and let forth an expletive to forever be recorded on the video. How embarrassing!! Then the next couple of falls we were able to drive with help from Chris and Charlie [Copsey] as spotters. (Trail Journal, *Surprise Canyon--Sledgehammer* Trip: May 11-16, 1995)

It is not just the beauty of the location, the extreme nature of the trail, or the companionship that makes the ride a success for Ed; it is a combination of all three.

There is, however, a subtle competition running through many trail rides. Using the most difficult approach to an obstacle, while still negotiating it smoothly, is a way of "milking the obstacle" or "going for the show." Often such informal competition is waged among friends and routinely occurs between those owning different vehicle makes. Jeep owners try to "prove" to vintage Bronco owners that Jeeps are superior, and Samurai owners like to show Jeep owners that their rigs are more agile.<sup>37</sup>

The rivalries go back and forth, fuelling playful ribs and driving duels during many trail rides; all are aimed at "proving" which vehicles can negotiate a given obstacle best. During *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* trail rides, when I attempt a section of difficult trail in my vintage Bronco, it is normal to hear Jeep owners yell: "Hey, do you want to trade that old sheet metal in for a Jeep?" Pressure is placed upon me to out-perform the Jeep drivers, or at least to yell a snappy come-back to the crowd. These rivalries are for fun; after all, "it's not the vehicle you drive but how you build it. Any vehicle can be trail-worthy if it's built right" (Quinn Mortensen). Those who

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<sup>37</sup> This rivalry is similar to that which exists between Ford and Chevrolet owners in the pro-street, funny car, and Indy racing communities.

take these competitions too seriously risk upsetting the carefully constructed outback community (Huizinga, 11).

Performance also extends to completing certain obstacles known for their difficulty, awarding successful drivers bragging rights. The slower one negotiates these zones, the more respect is generated. Many drivers have pictures of their rigs performing obstacles that prove the 4x4s prowess. This competitive driving does not take precedence over community spirit. Once one has made it over an extreme obstacle, s/he gets out of his/her rig to cheer on the next driver, doing all in his/her power to help them accomplish the task also. In this way, individuals succeed without being detrimental to the community atmosphere. The group succeeds also.

Getting 4x4s into the biggest "binds" possible is also a way of having fun (figs: 5.18-5.21). These become photo-shoot instances. During a *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* trail ride on *Poison Spider Mesa* trail, the group proceeded through a "v" shaped rock wedge that forces the drivers' side front tire into the air as vehicles emerge. Charlie Copsey waited at this spot with a measuring tape. As rigs emerged, he measured how high they lifted the airborne tire skyward (fig. 5.22). Many drivers got their rigs as "bound up" as possible, attempting to lift their tire the highest. Some would teeter precariously as the tire shot more than three feet into the air. When it seemed they would scrape the passenger's side of the rig on the inside of the notch, they stopped their vehicle to let Charlie measure how high the tire hung above the ground. After he had confirmed their height, they slowly eased the tire back to terra-firma and let the next driver try.

Trail leaders sometimes present games and prizes for trail ride participants.



FIG: 5.18 A driver lifts his rear tire high as he crosses the *Golden Crack*. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)



FIG: 5.19 A rig gets a tire airborne as it climbs out of the *Wedgie*. (Courtesy Dan Wynkoop)



**FIG: 5.20** On *Chicken Corners* trail Holly Neal pushes her Cherokee to see how far the suspension will flex.



**FIG: 5.21** Jeff Beach shows just how far his Jeep will flex before it "binds-up." (Courtesy Jeff Beach)



On the *Golden Spike* trail, near Moab, Utah, often-time trail leader Dan Mick awards gold painted railroad spikes to drivers who accidentally damage their rig. Two rigs that I witnessed had the spike incorporated into the decor of their rig. One mounted this prize on the hood; the other used the golden spike as a gear shift grip. This prize is awarded often because the trail is so rugged that at least 10% of the vehicles running it receive some form of mechanical or body damage. Many 4x4s must be towed out.



**FIG: 5.22** Charlie Copey measures a Jeep's air-borne tire. (Video clip courtesy *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*)

Chip Brox always plays games during the lunch breaks of the *Jeep Safari* trail rides he leads. He gives away prizes for the winners of quizzes concerning local history and topography. Children and adults alike yell answers to Chip's questions. Parents often work with their kids to get answers to the quizzes. During the *Jeep*

*Safari's* 1996 *Secret Spire* trail, he gave awards for categories like: youngest person (17 months), oldest person (70 years), vehicle that travelled the farthest to attend (Maryland),<sup>38</sup> tallest man (6'4"), tallest woman (5'11"), vehicle with most miles on the odometer (over 200,000), etc... Such activities involve every trail ride member.

Large rides like the annual three day trip through the *Rubicon* trail are catered. Participants are fed huge amounts of food (steak, lobster, etc) by caterers who are dropped-off by helicopter with their supplies. A large bandstand is located at the campsite near the center of the trail; each year a pop or country band is flown in to play for the participants (Kenny Loggins played one year). Portable generators power the electrical instruments. While adults dance to music, children play games, have out-door activities, and learn about wildlife, ecology, and *Tread Lightly!*.

This type of "wholesome family entertainment" is becoming more prevalent (*Red Rock 4-Wheelers*, 1994, 14). All types of social activities take place in the back country. The space is more than a place for driving off-road. It is seen as a place to escape, socialize, have fun, and relax among peers.

During one 1994 *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* trail ride, the entire club broke down into a water fight at a small stream. Members--ages ranging from retirement years to children--wrestled and splashed each other with the frigid water under the hot summer sun. This water fight is remembered by many, even years later. Several club members still swear revenge on Pam Nielsen, the person who allegedly initiated

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<sup>38</sup> When Chip asked which individual had travelled the farthest, Becci and I stated that we came from St. John's Newfoundland to attend the safari. A large family sitting across from us got excited and stated that they were Newfoundlanders who had moved to Colorado. Following the games we got together to talk about Newfoundland.

the battle.

The outback becomes a playground accessed by the vehicles that have enabled the drivers to get that far into its spaces. With vehicles being the mode of accessing and enjoying the back country, it is not surprising that movement itself becomes a motivating factor for enjoyment. Commenting about his *Surprise Canyon* trip, Ed Isaacson details the excitement and fun that can be had when a group maneuvers through the outback. Notice the words connoting movement, action, and advancement in his description:

As the day *progressed* this became the most awesome four-wheeling experience I have ever experienced. I would not have believed that it was possible for my Jeep to *go up that canyon*. If I hadn't watched someone else *ahead of me*, I know I would never have *attempted to even try*. I also gained an awesome appreciation of how important it is to *work together*, and how much fun it can be when everyone is watching out for their buddies, and are *working their buns off to help each other*. I doubt if I will ever have another experience any time soon, that is *as unique and fun and exciting*, and scary and *fulfilling*. It is hard to describe, and is nothing quite like I have experienced before. I will never forget this day. I was "surprised" again, and actually disappointed when Chris [Stephens] told me we were *at the top of the last falls*. My legs were aching and my hands were raw, and my feet were cold,<sup>39</sup> but I was grinning from ear to ear from the awesome day. (Trail journal, *Surprise Canyon—Sledgehammer* Trip: May 11-16, 1995, emphasis added)

Ed's commentary on movement is not unique. In fact, most Rock Crawlers refer to the back country in terms of movement. Even those not driving the 4x4s still refer to the experience in terms of movement: "I often get out of the truck and wander through [trail] areas that are difficult to get through. And I just enjoy

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<sup>39</sup> *Surprise Canyon* is comprised of multiple waterfalls that must be traversed as the water cascades down them. Ed was wet and tired from climbing up the water falls to help anchor winch cables and spot for the other drivers as the group ascended.

wandering around and looking at the topography around me, and enjoying the outdoors" (Becci Neal, 2/26/1997).

Trail rides move along, stopped only when someone breaks down. If the problem can be fixed in a few minutes, the group works to get the rig going again. If it cannot be repaired soon, it is helped out by a tail gunner.<sup>40</sup> Those who slow a ride down with an ill-prepped rig, or skills inadequate for the difficulty of the trail, are resented by the group. People mumble and gossip about the "boulevard cruiser who doesn't know that he is doing," or about "that brown Jeep that's bone stock."

During the 1993 *Jeep Safari's Gold Bar Rim* trail, Jake Trujillo was driving a Chevrolet Blazer that was so new (two weeks old!) that he had not had time to modify it. He found that it was having difficulty managing the trail due to its stock suspension configuration. Learning that part of the trail was a loop, and not wanting to slow group progress, he parked his rig and rode with another driver. He picked the truck up later in the ride. Such actions happen from time to time to maintain consistent group movement.

Movement, then, is central to the outback experience. Consequently, trail rides are discussed as "the exhilaration...the completion of a very difficult event....I went there and just walked right up this thing....you're all going to the same destination" (Jim Broadbent, 4/9/1996). Even when the group is at rest, its individuals are in motion. For instance, the rest stops themselves are also chances

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<sup>40</sup> Tail gunners are the trail leader's helper at the end of the group. They are chosen by the leader to help keep the group together, help those with broken rigs get back to town, and let the trail leader know what is occurring at the back-end of the party.

for movement. People mill about between the 4x4s to meet and talk with each other. Some pull out balls and gloves for games of catch. Frisbees are common. During Moab trail rides many participants, explore, hike through the sage tessellated desert or over and around the sandstone monoliths; they "enjoy looking at plants, or just enjoy...the sun" (Becci Neal, 2/26/1996).

Children—ubiquitous to most trail rides—chase each other or play with toys. In June, 1997, during a ride in *Salt Creek Canyon*, in southern Utah's *Canyonlands National Park*, several youngsters had fun during breaks chasing and catching lizards and frogs that they found in and around the trail. On other trail rides, children play with toys related to rock crawling. Remote controlled cars, pull toys and match box cars that look like 4x4s, and even diminutive motorized trucks that the children can sit in and drive have all appeared during breaks in the trail ride progress.

Just prior to when a break ends the trail leader will usually honk his/her car horn several times to signal that the group is preparing to move out. This lets those exploring out and away from the trail know that they need to return. Ed Isaacson has a special switch in his Jeep that allows him to differentiate between two horns in his rig. When the switch is turned to the normal position, his "street horn" blows when he hits his steering wheel. But when the switch is in the "off-road" position, a loud "harmonized dual horn"—like those on an 18 wheeler—blasts when the steering wheel is hit. This second horn "can be heard echoing up the canyons...people can hear it from miles away" (Brian Isaacson, 6/19/1997). Ed uses this special horn when he signals to exploring folks that his trail ride is preparing to leave.

Trail rides' play component can be characterized by movement. Whether that

movement be the piloting of one's rig, the progress of the group as a whole, or the exploring and interaction that occurs when the vehicles are at rest, the outback is a thoroughly energized experience. There is little time during its bounds for lethargy or rootedness. In fact, a new type of trail ride has evolved as a response to the current preoccupation with fitness. The *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* and other clubs now offer "combination trails" (*Red Rock 4-Wheelers*, 1993, 15). These trail rides combine driving and hiking sequences. They also exemplify the movement-equals-fun aspect of trail rides.

## THE RETURN

The return phase of the outback experience signals the dissolution of the specially framed world (Hughes, 109-11); this begins when the end of the trail is reached. Occasionally, the group gathers to take photos, capturing the special sense of togetherness existing solely on this trail. Yes, the group may do the same trail again, but the dynamic will differ—in fact, even the trailscape will have physically changed due to natural phenomenon like rain. "It changes all the time. It's not always the same. You don't always get the same experience when you drive [a] trail" (Allan Olsen, 4/12/1996). It will be, as it were, a new and distinct outback. "It's a new experience every time, because it's always changing. There's new people, and the trail changes" (Chip Brox, trailside conversation, *Salt Creek Canyon* trail, 6/22/1997).

As participants reach the trail's end, they ready their 4x4s for the return to the ordinary world. Drivers must undo those things that separated them from the ordinary world. Hubs are disengaged, disabling the front axle. Rigs regularly have special dis-connects for unhooking their sway bars. (Sway bars are disconnected because rigs get more wheel travel without them hampering axle articulation.) These detached sway bars are reconnected for street use (fig: 5.23). The grinding noises of transfer cases return as each rig is shifted out of 4-wheel drive, leaving them in 2-wheel drive.



**FIG: 5.23** Following a trail ride, Allan Olsen reaches under his Cherokee to re-attach the rig's front sway bar.

Many 4x4s have on-board air compressors, enabling them to "air up" their tires back to street driving pressures. The whirring sound of the compressors is accompanied by the whooshing sounds of tires being filled with air. Those without compressors use others' units, or drive to the closest gas station with an air pump.

People with trailered rigs drive them back to the waiting platforms (fig. 5.5, 5.6).

While doing these tasks, participants often mutter "back to the grind," and other phrases indicating the imminent return of the work-a-day world. The transition back to the work-a-day world can occur over a longer time period than that which initiated and "conjured" the outback (Hufford, 1992, 8, 42). This is because groups occasionally fail to reach the trail's end at the same time. Broken and damaged rigs being towed out, or limping out under their own power, take much longer to get off the trail.

Near the end of a 1994 safari ride over the *Fins 'N Things* trail, a Wrangler **grenaded** its rear drive shaft. The trail leader, Jean Akens, asked a responsible driver to lead the majority of the group out, while several of us stayed behind with her to help extract the Jeep. Nearly two hours later we tiredly towed the broken rig off the trail.

At the end of a ride through the *Jackhammer* trail—one of the most difficult trails in the United States—Shannon Shirk stayed behind to help damaged rigs finish. He began a narrative about running the trail by stating that it took him eight hours to complete its eight-tenths of a mile. Completing the ride, he stayed behind to help others, even though he was "beat to death" (4/21/1996).

Everybody helps out...We actually didn't get off the *Jackhammer* trail until—we rolled back into camp about ten-thirty that night. Because we were staying around and helping the people with the problems. I mean, we were actually done and sitting at the end of the trail by six o'clock. But because of the problems and breakdowns, it took another four hours to get the other vehicles out of there. I towed one home myself. (4/21/1996)



Such instances regularly occur, and often break-up the group as they exit the outback.<sup>41</sup>

As the group heads back to town, C.B. chatter is often less vigorous than it was on the way to the trail. People are tired from the drive; thoughts of responsibilities from the work-a-day world begin to creep back. Occasional comments drift over the air waves about chores that must be done in the next few days: "Next weekend I'm moving my business to a larger shop" (Brian Tanner, 9/1/1997). The tone is noticeably subdued, especially when compared with that of the morning. Mingled with these comments are remarks about the day's trip. People discuss changes to vehicles which must be made as a result of the day's trials. Congratulations to new drivers are aired. Others rib the experienced driver who may have scratched paint, or had difficulty over an obstacle.

The outback world slips behind as the group heads home, to their camp site, or hotel. Realizing this, participants often seek to extend this "world" through further association. This can and does occur because the outback play zone frames are malleable, being "notoriously leaky affairs" (Hughes, 109). Participants employ several strategies to "leak" the back country into the work-a-day world.

Participants often head to a location where the outback spirit can continue. Restaurants, camping sites, hotel rooms, and participants' homes all provide excellent locations to assemble and discuss the day's activities. Such gatherings elongate the outback into the ordinary world. After a trail ride in Moab on Memorial

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<sup>41</sup> As we will discuss, even though the outback is being left behind physically, its affects persist for a time.

Day, 1994, *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* met in a south-western style restaurant to reminisce about the day's activities and plan future trail rides. The group sat at the tables until late into the night swapping stories, giving each other driving advice,<sup>42</sup> and laughing at mishaps remembered from the day's drive--and from past trails.

This outback elongation is done by recalling the triumphs, accidents, breakdowns, and jokes that occurred during the day's trail ride(s). "By early evening everyone was back in camp and ready for the traditional barbecue cookout. After dinner, drivers, passengers and spotters gathered around...to swap stories and heckle friends" (Riddle, 42-4). For instance, following New Mexico's 1997 *Las Cruces* trail rides, participants attended a "mexican buffet dinner and get-together that found everyone swapping war stories from the day's adventures. All agreed that the event this year was the best ever" (Howell, 1997b, 52). Of course, a good bit of bragging takes place. People's feats are enlarged and the outback becomes a zone for heroism.

By rhetorically keeping the back country alive in the ordinary world, participants continue to live in this other world, thus minimizing the ordinary world in which they are now located. Video tapes made during the day also keep work-a-day world responsibilities at bay. Members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* occasionally go to members' homes for barbecue, and to watch videos, after locally held trail rides. But, inevitably, the world of responsibility encroaches. Participants must bid farewell and drive home.

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<sup>42</sup> Biesty notes that "play...develops capacities" (14).

## KEEPING THE OUTBACK ALIVE

When Rock Crawlers return to the ordinary world and cannot get to the back country, they find ways of drawing it--and its social dynamic--to them. Outback "enclaves" are created when Rock Crawlers gather to relive experiences through stories about trips to back country locations (Hufford, 1992, 145-6). Such events can "overflow" into the ordinary world through more than mere story telling sessions (Douglas, 13). People gather together to watch video tapes and even compare photos. Many clubs--such as the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers*--gather to show each other photos, and even share negatives or copies. Through these activities, drivers can gain new perspectives on trail rides they did. Seeing the pictures elicits memories which invoke outback experiences once again. *Lone Peak* even has a special calendar that lists monthly scheduled activities. Each month is graced with a picture of different club members engaged in back country driving action.

When I moved from Utah to Newfoundland, many club members sent photos, letters, and video tapes to me. These contained accounts focusing on who did what and where. These letters kept the back country alive for me while I was separated from it by so many miles. When I missed associating with friends on these trails, I looked at the pictures or watched the video tapes. I was transported there instantly.

One special means of summoning the back country dynamic is through trail ride journals. These are special written accounts detailing ventures into the outback. Rock Crawlers occasionally keep such specialized narratives. Some use computers

so they can scan pictures into these texts. They detail the trails taken, who attended, and any action sequences that would help those who were there to remember the excursion. Yet these diaries have more than personal significance. They are often given to friends who could not attend the event so that they can vicariously enjoy the experience. In effect, they can become part of the group.

Eugene Scofield wrote a letter detailing the trail rides and fun that his family had with their close friends while attending the 1996 *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* (figs: 5.24a, b, c). The notes look like a magazine article, and the writing style is modelled after reviews found in many off-road oriented publications. He took copies to the May, 1996, *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* club meeting to share them with his friends there. Eugene commented that he "mailed them to [his] friends around the country that couldn't make it to the *Jeep Safari* this year" (4/1996). By mailing the letter to his friends, they are able to read about, and see photos of, the outback experience shared amongst their friends. They too can enjoy this world.

Ed Isaacson records elaborate descriptions of his off-road exploits in his trail journal.<sup>43</sup> While I was conducting my 1996 field work in Utah, he delivered a package to me that he thought "might be helpful." It contained a series of pictures of his family off-road with their Jeep. Also included was a 23 page, single-spaced, excerpt from his trail journal. This not only detailed the beauty of the back country, but his feelings about each trip, who he spent meaningful time with, what the group did, what vehicle parts were broken, what the weather was like, and what he learned

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<sup>43</sup> As readers may have noticed, some of his trail journal has appeared in the preceding pages.

# Moab trails

## A newsletter for those who love Moab!

I thought that I would put together this little newsletter for all of our friends that we met at Easter this year. Included are some photos of various jeeps and trails that we saw.

This is a first time effort and therefore may be a little rough around the edges, but if you like it or have any suggestions just let me know.

We arrived early Friday night in time to get camp set up before sundown. There appeared to be more folks in previous weather promising that we had in night before. Melendy from stopped by a while. Ed's major changes almost didn't Sporting a and shackle reversal with the new pre-runner style front bumper makes for a very unique CJ. We enjoyed seeing them again.



camp than in years. The looked after the snow Salt Lake the Ed and Rhea Phoenix and visited for done some to his CJ5, I recognize it!

spring-over

Saturday we just played around at the Dump-bump and Potato Salad Hill. Of course the Safari Gods smiled on us and it turned out to be just another picture perfect day in Moab. Dave and Robin and their son and daughter (non-jeepers, but not for long!) Where down for the weekend and went bike riding only to have a close encounter with a VERY territorial bull. Fast pedaling was the order of the day, but we are happy to report only happy results and lasting memories.



Sunday was the Golden Spike Trail. This shot shows Ed coming down off Skyline Drive. It's steep! Check out the compression of the front springs and extension of the rear! That'll put your knees against the dash

board. Speaking of knees against the dashboard, look at what happens when you put a 6' 7" guy behind (above? around?) the wheel of a short flatfender. Kinda like driving a go-kart. Watching this gentleman wind himself in and out of the jeep was some kind of show!



FIG: 5.24a Eugene Scofield's trail journal.



The Golden Crack provided its share of photo-ops with several rigs getting some big-time air. This Fourrunner had the whole peanut gallery running for their cameras! There was about 5 feet of

air under the rear bumper. There appears to be a line for air and scraped bumpers and another that even our jeep with 30" tires can do without scraping. I guess that swaybar disconnects really do work, judging by the front axel droop on my Wrangler. No air, no cameras, no pucker factor.

On Monday, Kathy drove her first 3+ trail, the 3-D. We showed up at Lion's Park and found that only the trail leader Ollie Plimpton and his tail-gunner Reed and ourselves had showed up for the run! We hit the road, the

shortest run of the week. Last year we followed Ollie and succeeded in getting misdirected (lost?) Several times, but always managed to find the right



route again in a short time. This year, however, wasn't to be the same. Ollie lost 2 canyons this time! We did find the last half of the trail and did get back to town in time for supper. Next year maybe we'll call it "Ollie goes Northwest and gets back for Supper Trail!"

Here's Kathy climbing Tough Hill like a pro, not even spinning a wheel. I think that she's hooked and that I better find a jeep of my own if I ever want to drive a trail again. Maybe she'll let me put a winch on mine so I can help her out. Sounds like a good excuse to me. Honestly, it was kind of pleasant to sit back an



enjoy the scenery and take lots of pictures for a change, she gonna spoil me.

FIG: 5.24b Eugene Scofield's trail journal.

By midweek town was really starting to fill-up. Everyone was remarking that it seemed more crowded earlier this year. I guess that with the boom in sport-utility vehicles, ever more people are looking to do more with their fourwheel drives than just go to the store and the ski slopes. I'm glad that there is a size limit on the runs or the whole thing might get unmanageable. A great amount of credit goes to the Red Rock Four Wheelers for the incredible job that they do every year.

Friday dawned bright with the promise of a warm and windy day. Kathy and I met up with the Lone Peak 4-accepting an from our the Slickrock Tracy and The Lone going to drive Cliffhanger club run and forward to always wanted Arlyn Richard and did an making sure that no one got too far ahead or behind.

Of course, the scenery was just magnificent with views of the Behind-the-Rocks area and the La Sals in the background. Then later looking into the Colorado River Gorge from the top of 1200 foot cliffs with the trail just feet from the edge. We had only one minor problem with a tire popping a bead on the way up, but on the way back down a broken U-joint on one truck and another drivetrain problem (lost my notes and can't remember what it was) gave members a chance to show us what can be done on the trail with lots of experience, tools, spare parts and willing hands can do. Problems were solved and jeeps were back up and running in no time in the true nature of the club. They impressed us with the friendliness and helpfulness of all of the club members. It turned out that the Cliffhanger was one of the best runs that we have been on in a long time and we look forward to spending more time with the Lone Peakers.



Wheeler's, invitation neighbors at Campground, Christy Holt Peakers were t h e Trail for their we looked this as we had to try this one. lead the trail excellent job

Big Saturday was warm and sunny (are all days in Moab this pleasant, or just 95%?). I lined up for the Moab Rim along with 35 other trucks anticipating a great day on the trail. Our daughter, Tara, and Granddaughter, Allie along with our roomer, Summer had come down from Salt Lake the night before.

Kathy stayed in town to visit with Tara and Allie, so Summer went with me on the trail. The climb up to the rim is exciting due to the fact that the wrong line in a couple of places could roll you right off



the edge and onto the pavement several hundred feet below. No place to lose your concentration on your driving! The views from the top of the rim were breathtaking. With the snowcapped La Sals in the background, the fresh greens of early spring stood even more. With no problems or breakdowns on the way up, we had time to hike to the ruins and rock art at the top of the trail. Surprisingly with



as much accessibility as there is to this spot, the drawings where in very good shape with very little defacement. If, in keeping with the Tread Lightly ethics, we can maintain the backcountry areas in the same kind of shape, we can preserve wild country access for all of us to enjoy.



This year I saw more people taking the time and effort to practice good backcountry manners.

Easter Sunday in Moab is quiet and peaceful with most folks headed home or at the sand hill race. My daughter had just bought a Geo Tracker and wanted to see what it could do stock, so we headed out on the Chicken Corners trail as she had never fourwheeled before. Both she and I were



impressed by what the little truck could do. When we had left town that morning, she had said "Dad, I don't want any ruts or m u d , asked if wanted a freeway. way back though, "If I had tires, I hit as and could go on tougher trails." I knew she was hooked. Now she can't wait for the Cal-Mini catalogue to come in! Maybe they sell pontoons and oars.



rocks or hills or O.K." I s h e d i r t On the into town she says bigger wouldn't m u c h

Overall, Easter Safari was great this year. We renewed old acquaintances and made new friends. Got lots of ideas for spending more money on Doo-Dads and other **important stuff**. I can't thank Ed enough for all his help installing the add-a-leaves.

Our very good friend Don McCune is getting transferred to New Orleans and will have to learn how to jeep Cajun Style. We are going to miss getting lost with him. With his sense of direction and my map reading skills we were guaranteed to spend all day figuring out that none of those spurs were the main trail!

We'll see y'all on Labor Day for the Campout weekend in Moab!



needed to be changed on the Jeep. Like Eugene, Ed shares these notes with friends. Parts of them have even appeared in *News Peaks: Newsletter of the Lone Peak Four Wheelers*, the club's monthly news letter.

The importance of trail journals, video tapes, photographs and story telling sessions, is that they invoke the back country and its social dynamic, creating an escape enclave when one may not be physically possible (Hufford, 1992, 146). In this way, the outback--and the social magic it offers--can be accessed any time. This possibility also highlights the leakiness of the frame which binds and separates back country spaces from ordinary life. When Rock Crawlers want to escape the work-a-day world, or if they simply cannot get to the outback, these genres offer escape.

## CONCLUSION

Back country trips seem to offer participants a heightened sense of awareness concerning their social role. Many state that upon returning from these experiences, they have a renewed understanding of the importance of friends and family--and how trivial many other activities that occupy one's days are. Others echo this assertion, stating that being in the outback helps them to put things "into perspective." "This is what it's all about; enjoying [back country] beauty with great company" (trailside comment, *Salt Creek Canyon* trail, 6/22/1997).

A woman on the *Salt Creek Canyon* trail ride thanked Chip Brox, the trail



leader, for the excellent ride. She called him "a saint" and said that she and her husband could not credit him enough for showing them "some of the most beautiful, spiritual, places on earth" (6/22/1997). Later, plans were made to make the excursion an annual event among the small (six 4x4s) group.<sup>44</sup>

It is normal for participants to feel a post trail ride let-down as they re-enter their normal lives. Many attempt to extend the special feelings of the back country into the work-a-day world. These are attempts to ensure that: "the feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual [trail ride]" (Huizinga, 12). This extended "magic" is embodied within the special groupness created by the experience.

This may explain why Rock Crawlers stick closely together in the ordinary world. According to Shannon Shirk, members of the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* attend each others' weddings, religious rituals, family gatherings, and parties (4/21/1996). As noted above, participants comment that they come away from back country trips feeling that one's friends and family are the most important things in life. Many attempt to keep this perspective in the ordinary world by closely maintaining club affiliations.

The conclusion to Ed Isaacson's *Surprise Canyon—Sledgehammer: May 11-16, 1995* trail journal entry articulates these feelings regarding the importance of

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<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, this was not possible. During the Summer, 1998, a federal judge closed the *Salt Creek Canyon* trail to all motorized traffic.

family and friends. Ed's elegiac prose also highlights the feelings of camaraderie commonly felt among trail ride participants:

Then the long drive back home. It was made pleasant and relaxing with the constant chatter on the CB and we finally got the system down with the motor home in front, and the campers drafting along close behind. Looked like a convoy on the freeway. It was with sadness that we got on the CB one last time, and thanked each other again for the great adventure we had shared, and will remember so vividly for the rest of our lives. I will never forget Surprise Canyon, and am already thinking ahead to the possibility of another trip some day. But more importantly I will never forget the experience of spending such an enjoyable few days with people who have become such good friends. That is priceless.

Besides providing a fitting closure for this discussion, Ed's comments also form an excellent bridge to chapter six, which deals with the experiential aspects of rock crawling. I will discuss how trail rides—namely those at the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari*—are experienced by the participants. Having noted the rules and structures inherent to an organized off-road event, it is now time to explore the actual process as it occurs to the participants.

## EXPERIENCING THE MOAB EASTER JEEP SAFARI

When people engage in ritual activity, they separate themselves, partially if not totally, from the roles and statuses they have in the workaday world. There is a threshold in time or space or both, and certainly a demarcation of behavior, over which people pass when entering ritual. (Driver, 159)

I was hooked. Oh, my adrenaline pumped all day long. I was completely hooked!  
(Charlie Copsey, 7/20/1994)

To research a community one must become part of the action. True understanding simply cannot occur without information gleaned through "total participation" and "total sacrifice" (Turnbull, 76). For this reason participant observation is a mainstay of the ethnographic process. However, this is difficult and experienced ethnographers readily admit that "performance experience...is something the outsider has to specifically go out of his/her way to get from the inside" (Schechner, 28). Others assent, stating that, "good ethnographic research takes a *long time*" (Henry Glassie, *Fife Conference*, 6/13/1997). This is where being a Rock Crawler provides me with added insight. As a community member, I am in a unique position to include my own "performance experience."

The object of this chapter is to give readers a sense of what *I feel* while

participating in events during the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. As a Rock Crawler, I am well acquainted with these situations. I have access to attitudes and information that may never be revealed to people outside this community. It is not that Rock Crawlers keep these things secret, such topics may not be discussed simply because these attitudes and experiences might not be deemed worthy of explication. Such knowledge is usually learned by association and not through discussion (Bernstein, 56-8; McCarl, 1978, 109). These unarticulated experiences are often those most important to a community, and are played out during performative contexts, like trail rides (Dunk, 65, 67). Such activities, then, are important to understanding these peoples' values and motivations (McCarl, 1978, 109).

George P. Horse Capture's description of several young native individuals who wanted to become pow wow drum players applies to the discussion of learning through in-group participation:

A boyhood friend, Gordon Lodge, a Gros Ventre member of the Hays Singers, remembers that as a boy when he and a close friend...wanted to learn to sing, they sat in with a family group and for several years were only allowed to tap the rim of the drum while the group performed. This long apprenticeship was necessary so that they both had a lengthy exposure to singers, their songs and their subtle nuances. (12)

This example is relevant because the underlying idea held by these native peoples is that only through intense observation and personal involvement (in this case a silent tap on a drum rim) can an individual achieve a true mastery or understanding of an event. The youths learned, intimately, the nuances of certain aspects of their culture through participation. This knowledge entitled them to fully participate later,

and, ultimately, teach others from the perspective they had gained.

In similar fashion, my experience as a participant—and leader<sup>1</sup>—in trail rides at Moab, enables me to teach others based upon my perspective of the events taking place there. Through narrative, I aim to approximate what I experience as a participant of this multi-national rock crawling event. I choose to experiment with the narrative format because it vividly provides my perception of what it is to participate in a trail ride during the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers' Moab Easter Jeep Safari*.

I hope that through the narrative a different understanding of the rock crawling culture will be imparted to readers. Yet something more will be revealed; I will impart myself.<sup>2</sup> Readers will be able to “get inside” my thoughts and motivations, as a member of the rock crawling community.<sup>3</sup> To facilitate this I have used the language and expressions common to regular group interaction.

The narrative text is counter-balanced and expanded through critical commentary.<sup>4</sup> This commentary also helps to contextualize the narrative passages.

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<sup>1</sup> I lead the *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* on a trail ride through the *Poison Spider Mesa* trail, in Moab, during the Summer of 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Levi-Strauss similarly revealed himself to his readers through his auto-ethnographic work *Tristes Tropiques*. Unfortunately, referring to his informant base through terms like, “snotty-nosed urchin[s]” and “miserable creatures doomed to early extinction, whose chief occupations meanwhile are delousing themselves and sleeping,” powerfully revealed his prejudice and eurocentrism (1974, 375).

<sup>3</sup> For more on personal narrative as self-revelatory construct, see: Stahl, 20-8.

<sup>4</sup> I realize that narrative structure can be as problematic as a more “dispassionate” approach. I agree with Hayden White when he asserts that we use narratives due to “a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (24).

Keep in mind that these comments can be equally as personal as the narrated *Jeep Safari* experience; what I believe is relevant to the critical discussion also reflects my perceptions concerning this event. Thus, these sections are just as much of a construct as the narrative passages. Yet, due to their formal structure, the critical commentaries stand in stark opposition to the narrative. As such, they provide a different voice.

This chapter is structured as follows: the two voices are counterpoised as if in conversation. This dialectical relationship—heightened by differing fonts—not only plays the two voices against each other, it highlights the “incompleteness” of each when standing alone. I hope that the tension inherent to this display projects a more complete vision of *my Moab experience*, while also exploring alternative ways to present ethnographic data. Remember, this is not any trail ride at the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*; it is *my* trail ride. To truly understand the safari one must become a participant oneself.

The narrative—and accompanying discussion—trace my activities from arriving at the town of Moab, to participating in a trail ride, to returning home after the event. Although the narrative reads as a single trip, it is in actuality a composite of several years’ activities. At the beginning of each narrative section, the events’ actual date has been noted.

## THE MOAB EXPERIENCE

The *Red Rock 4-Wheeler's Moab Easter Jeep Safari* is one of the world's premier organized off-road events and takes place in the desert surrounding the Southern Utah town of Moab. The event attracts thousands of people from all over the world. Many non-4-wheelers think that safari trail rides are rallies or races. After returning from the event, I have been asked by non-Rock Crawlers if I "won." This indicates the common assumption that all automotive sports are necessarily confrontational (that is that they are person vs. person); applying such perceptions to the rock crawling community cannot be farther from the truth (Peterson, 257).

Rather than rigorous interpersonal competition, rock crawling gains its competitiveness primarily through "accomplishing...feats, triumphing over obstacles, establishing precarious records for endurance...[and] precision,...in a word,...from [accomplishing]...performance[s] difficult to equal" (Caillois, 37). In fact, participating vehicles rarely achieve speeds over "three miles an hour" (Chip Brox, 4/7/1996). The trail activities are not organized for competition, but for group cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

The *Jeep Safari's* many activities provide "a time and place set apart from routine living" for Rock Crawlers to see desert scenery, test their driving skills on trails rated according to difficulty, and—of premier importance—to enjoy the company of friends and family (Peterson, 258). Many trail ride participants enjoy the

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<sup>5</sup> Although a current of friendly competition surrounding driving performance can exist among many participants.

"camaraderie" (Glenn Wakefield, 10/24/1996). Shannon Shirk started 4-wheeling as a youth with his father, he now goes with his wife, and they "plan to go" with the "kids" they hope to have in the future (4/21/1996). Chris Stephens similarly comments:

the best trips for me are the ones that [my wife] totally enjoys too...We have a lot of friends and we all go out as couples and that really makes it fun. You know, just go out, have fun, and be with my wife--4-wheel. (7/21/1994)

Crowds attracted by the event are truly eclectic; people from numerous locations other than Utah typically attend. Ber Knight, Information Officer for the *Red Rock 4-Wheelers*—the club hosting the event—notes that individuals come from as far as Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Florida. Additionally, others have attended from foreign countries such as Canada, England, Norway, Switzerland, and Chile solely to enjoy the activities (5/12/1995). During the 1994 safari several vehicles were brought from Iceland. After they arrived at New York City via boat, they were transported across the country on flat-bed trailers towed by 18-wheeled long-haul trucks.

More than 1,200 vehicles were registered with the club as participants for the 1993 *Jeep Safari*, and an estimated 500 to 1000 additional vehicles arrived that were not officially registered for the event. According to a Summer, 1997, *Red Rock 4-Wheelers* newsletter, "attendance at the 1997 event was 1,500 [officially registered] vehicles."<sup>6</sup> Trail rides were lead by "150 trail officials." During the 1997 safari,

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<sup>6</sup> According to *Four Wheeler* magazine, the 1997 *Jeep Safari* was attended by "over 4,500 gear grinders [drivers]" driving "at least 1,650 rigs" (Jim Allen, 65).



at least six official trails were run every day, with the average being eight to ten...the final weekend of the event featured 27 trails run simultaneously. The sight of at least 1,300 4x4s lined up in various spots around town was enough to stir the blood of the doorest four wheeler (Jim Allen, 65).

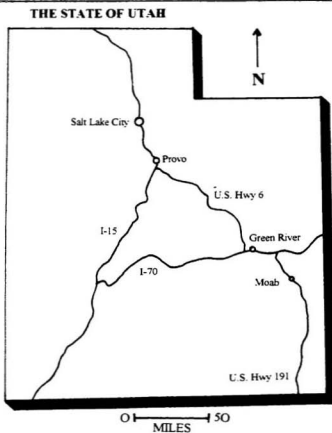
More and more vehicles register every year (Ber Knight, 5/12/1995).

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*We are near the Utah-Colorado border and heading south on Utah highway 191. Thirty-three miles south of the east-west running U.S. Interstate 70, we curve between the mountains, drop into the valley and drive towards Moab (fig:6.1). Lights from the town twinkle below in the crisp late night desert air. Even close to midnight it is obvious that the Jeep Safari is under way. Ultra-modified 4-wheel drives are everywhere. Headlights bounce along trails in the mountains that are now towering over our heads. To me, those headlights exemplify freedom, just like birds floating on the winds.*

*Soon after we cross the Colorado River several other rigs whiz past us on the divided lane freeway. Usually they drive in groups, like convoys, as they come and go from locations deep within the desert or the La Sal mountains. During the day these groups string along in packs of two to fifty 4x4s. But this late at night you rarely see more than ten together at a time. There is a reason for these groups. You never go into the outback alone, you always go with friends in case you get stuck, break a part, or even worse, roll your rig. Besides, going on trail rides is about being with friends and making new ones--not about being alone. Working together with others to get through a trail is half the fun.*

*Entering Moab, we see even more 4x4s parked along the streets and at hotels, shops, bars, and eating establishments throughout the small town. Nearly all the vehicles are off-*



**FIG: 6.1** Our Route to Moab; take I-15 south to Hwy 6; at Green River take I-70 east; then turn onto Hwy 191. *roadsters. They are everywhere! In mock reverence I whisper to my wife Becci: "We must be in heaven." She grins at the half-joke, knowing that for me this is as close to heaven as I can get while on Earth.*

*It is the Thursday night prior to Easter Sunday; the excitement has been ongoing since the safari started the previous Friday. We have arrived to "do" trails on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Some people take off from work for the entire nine days. Because*

*Becci and I are on a student budget, we can only afford the festivities occurring at the event's conclusion. Even though three days of heavy rock crawling may seem excessive to some, it has never been enough for us. We dream of one day staying for all nine days.*

*My excitement level rises. Becci always gets a laugh out of watching me try to see every 4x4 at once; snapping my head in all directions, I try to catch every sight. She jokes that I am like a "kid in a candy store." There's no argument from me. I feel a new energy and verve come into my psyche. Like our friends, I have waited and prepared for this moment since the safari ended last year. We arrive at the hotel, where we have a reservation; I circle our rig around the parking lot—to see the other vehicles—before finding a place to park. Finally, I pull into a spot near the building.*

*Minutes later, while Becci is getting the luggage out of the Bronco, I run over to check out the modifications on a baddass tangerine-orange Jeep CJ-7 a few spaces over. It is a perfect balance between mechanical innovation and aesthetics. "Jeez Dave, you can look at that later," says Becci as she strains with our food-crammed cooler, "right now, come help me with these bags." I'm urgent: "But what if it's gone tomorrow?" She flashes me a look of mock exasperation and heads for the hotel door. Soon, we are in our room, meeting friends who have made it there before us. Clothes for the harsh desert climate,<sup>7</sup> food supplies for the trail rides, spare vehicle parts, hiking gear, and other paraphernalia are all heaped and strewn about the small room.*

*Everyone gets settled in and hits the beds (or sleeping bags on the floor) as soon as*

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<sup>7</sup> The temperature during these day-long desert trips has been known to fluctuate back and forth between one-hundred degrees fahrenheit and freezing. Winter and Summer gear is, therefore, needed.

*possible. The line-up for the up-coming trail ride on Friday meets early in the morning. But I can't sleep. Images of the Moab trails dance in my head, causing me to toss and turn. For every trail I drive, I must do it 1,000 other times in my head. Lying there, I can hear the low-growling engines of rigs as they return to town from their desert ventures.*

*Early Friday morning we pack the Bronco with essential items for the day, such as food, drinks, a tire repair kit, tire pressure gauge, spare oil and power steering fluid, radiator and power steering hoses, plenty of water for us and the Bronco, and a C.B. This may seem excessive, but some people bring even more equipment and auto parts to prepare for the extremes the desert can offer.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Victor Mokler and others bring spare axle shafts, starters, and even spare alternators and **hubs**.\*<sup>9</sup> Soon we are heading to the meeting place pre-determined for our trail ride. The air bristles with excitement.*

## SEPARATION

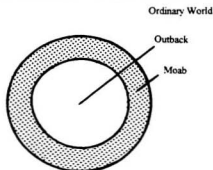
As mentioned earlier, people arrive from all over the world to participate in this event. Different classes, ethnicities, regions, even people of different ages, sexes, and clubs are represented. Yet, the town serves as a sort of antistructural buffer

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<sup>8</sup> Literary scholar David Teague aptly notes that "the ability to enjoy the desert's redeeming features is inversely proportional to the hazards it presents" (54). Thus, preparation is key to a safe and enjoyable trail ride.

<sup>9</sup> During the 1996 safari, Victor simultaneously blew a hub and an alternator as he attempted a climb on the *Hell's Revenge* trail. His expert driving skills helped him avoid a roll-over. Quickly, he unpacked (from the back of his Jeep) a spare hub and spare alternator, and installed them. Less than twenty minutes after the near-tragedy, he piloted his Jeep up the ledge, accompanied by the cheers of those along the trail's side.

against rifts that could potentially exist between these groups in the normal world (Driver, 160; Hufford, 1992, 43; Victor Turner, 1980, 159) (fig. 6.2). All associated with the safari seem to have fun together, united by the commonality of the rock crawling lifestyle. Ed Isaacson details his first experience with the friendly *Jeep Safari* tone: "Van and I got up early (8 AM), and drove into Moab downtown and could not believe our eyes as we saw about a thousand Jeeps all lined up on Main Street and everyone having a ball" (trail journal: 1990).




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FIG: 6.2 The town of Moab serves as a buffer between the ordinary world and the outback one.

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Despite this commonality between participants, their economic disparity is evident.<sup>10</sup> People lacking the money to stay in hotels, camp in the desert east of Moab or north of town along the Green River; more prosperous groups stay in hotels, motels, or bed-and-breakfasts. Some groups pack many individuals into one

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<sup>10</sup> Using data from surveys made by the *Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association* (SEMA), Alfreda Vaughn has determined that Rock Crawler household income "averages [at] \$62,632 per year...30 percent of subjects...earn \$50,000 to 74,999 annually...25.4 percent bring home more than 74, 999 every year; 20.6 percent, \$35,000 to \$49,000 annually; 13.8 percent, \$25,000 to \$34,999 annually; 6.4 percent, \$15,000 to \$24,999 and 3.8 percent, less than \$15,000" (17).

motel room. Many rooms in the hotel where I stayed during the 1993 safari were crammed with participants; sleeping bags covered any available floor space. Despite accommodations, the differences between the economic statuses of the participants can often appear most evident when looking at the vehicles. Rock crawling is now moving from its middle-class roots to the wealthy social classes. Consequently, vehicles are becoming more and more elaborate (Chip Brox, 4/7/1996). Despite the economic range of the entrants, the safari is a place for enthusiasts to "commune...together" with people like themselves, Rock Crawlers (Victor Turner, 1969, 96).

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*Driving to our meeting location, I spot the set-up that has the town gossiping. It is said to be a custom Greyhound bus that was built specifically for the owner. The bus is decorated with tinted windows, a custom painted graphic design, and highly polished aluminum rims. This paint scheme is matched on the fully enclosed, climate-controlled trailer; this houses a radically modified Jeep Wrangler. The Jeep, parked behind the trailer, is also painted with the same eye catching custom graphic design. The outfit is astounding! The rumor is that the entire ensemble is supposed to have cost nearly a half-million bucks. Looking at them all together, I don't doubt it. The Jeep alone looks like at least a \$55,000 modification. Becci and I ask each other: "How must it be to have the money to build such a great outfit? That person must be some big corporate magnate." I smile: "I'll never make money like that being a folklorist." Becci laughs: "But at least you get to go to cool stuff like this and then study and write about it." Hey, she has a point.*

*We debate options that would be on this ensemble if we had built it. Of course the color would have to be changed to yellow—to match our Bronco. The rock crawler would have a **ARB “Air Locker”**\* in the front **Dana 44\*** axle; a **reverse-cut\* Dana 60\*** rear axle with a **Detroit Locker\*** would replace our current Detroit locked **Nine Inch\*** set-up. Our ultimate rig would also sport a **torque splitter\***. Wild Horses front coil springs, National Springs rear leaf springs, and steeper gearing! It would then be used for off-road only, instead of also serving us as a daily driver.*

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Vehicles are often towed or trailered into town, enabling extremely dedicated drivers to ride in a more comfortable “street vehicle” while towing the off-road rig behind (figs: 5.5, 5.6). Additionally, if their vehicle is broken on a trail ride it can easily be towed home. Some rigs are built for off-road use only; this means they are only driven on trail rides. Many cannot legally be driven on public roads. Reasons for this may include: state limitations regarding suspension height or ultra-radical suspensions, tire height, or engine and exhaust modification regulations.<sup>11</sup> Some vehicles may be geared so low that they cannot easily be driven on public roads. Any of these modifications may necessitate trailering a vehicle. Obviously, not all participants have the money needed to build an off-road only vehicle.

Most rigs—commonly referred to as “daily drivers”—are regularly driven on the street and have been modified as much as the law, or the wallet, will allow. Extra-

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<sup>11</sup> These laws vary from state to state. Many vehicles that are legal in Arizona—with its lax lift-height laws—are illegal in Utah.

flashy or radically modified trucks always attract many spectators, or owners of similar vehicles, who want tips for building their own trucks. Of all the types of 4x4s in Moab during the safari, Shannon Shirk primarily looks for the vintage-style Broncos<sup>12</sup> because that is what he and his wife Aimee own. Allan Olsen, a Jeep Cherokee owner, looks forward to meeting other Cherokee drivers and experiencing a "common bond" with them (4/12/1996). People use the safari as a place to network with others who have vehicles like their own.

Upon finding owners of these vehicles, an instant connection is established, despite differences in the social strata of the individuals. Information, stories of vehicle prowess, pictures, addresses, and even automotive parts are traded. "A sense of harmony," or *communitas* is easily noticed (Victor Turner, 1991, 13). *Communitas* is a general feeling of equality, brotherhood, and community which, despite the possible "tangle of [social and economic] conflicts and disharmonies," is temporarily created during events such as the safari (13). This social transformation

takes the form of symbolic manipulation...Among the most common is inversion, the reversal of the established social order, including social hierarchy...In hierarchical societies symbolic inversion creates an upside-down world...it declares egalitarianism to be in order for the duration of the festival. (Stoeltje, 1992, 268)

Friendships come easily among people united to enjoy the desertscape and the automobiles utilized for traversing it.

Chris and Tamara Stephens have numerous friends and acquaintances that they have met at the safari. These people live in Utah, and as far away as

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<sup>12</sup> Broncos built between the years 1966 to 1977 are known by Rock Crawlers as "vintage Broncos."



California. At other points in the year they unite with these friends at Moab, other trails in Utah, or at locations in the home states of these friends (4/1996).

People not willing to engage in this type of friendship are quickly noted and the information is passed on. These participants are often "treated as though they [are] acting in a totally inappropriate and unacceptable way" (Hughes, 101). During the 1993 safari I met another vintage Bronco<sup>13</sup> owner. During the course of our conversation, a third Bronco owner was mentioned. When I referred to this person's Bronco, the individual with whom I was talking responded: "Hey, that...Bronco is built, I've been on rides with that guy and his rig can do anything--but the guy's an ass. He won't talk to anybody." Other individuals have subsequently reiterated this opinion. Each comment hinged upon the individual's lack of willingness to engage in the friendly interaction expected during trail rides.

Much of the bantering, socializing, and meeting of friends begins at the trail "line-up." Registered participants get in line at a previously noted street (figs: 6.3, 6.4). Each trail ride has between 25 and 100 vehicles that can be officially registered. This number depends upon how many vehicles are allowed at once upon the land by the *Bureau of Land Management* (BLM). This is because the impact of a large group travelling through some trails might be too great. Small group sizes lessen the possibility of this harmful impact. The trail's difficulty level can also limit vehicle numbers. If too many rigs are registered for an extremely arduous trail, it could take more than the day to complete.

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<sup>13</sup> I own a 1975 Bronco.



FIG: 6.3 Vehicles lined-up for a *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* trail ride.

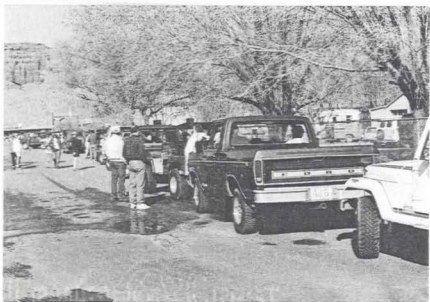


FIG: 6.4 People mill about and talk while lined-up prior to a trail ride.

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*We arrive at the line-up, and I pull our Bronco into position behind our friend, Quinn Mortensen, and his Bronco. He has saved the spot for us. Like others at the line-up we begin to meet friends, make new ones, and check out other drivers' rigs. Since all drivers are asked to arrive at least an hour before the ride leaves, this gives us plenty of time to mill around and talk. Trail leaders use this time to inspect the vehicles for safety and to meet with each driver prior to the ride, so I watch our Bronco. The trail leader, Jean Akens, comes over to do the pre-trail inspection on our rig (fig. 6.5). I walk up to talk with her, beginning a conversation with a comment about the beautiful weather, great for desert driving. She agrees, then begins to ask some technical questions about the Bronco.*

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**FIG: 6.5** Trail Leader Jean Akens and another safari official (at left of photo) begin an inspection of our Bronco.

*I quickly learn that she is a Ford driver also; she is interested in what modifications Becci and I have made to our rig. I take the opportunity to show her the suspension that I built for the truck. She looks at our bumpers and comments on the fact that she's never seen any like them on other vintage Broncos. She asks what gears we are using, and if I like the tires we're running. I tell her that we've got 4.10:1 (four-ten to one) gears in the axles, and a re-gear'd automatic transmission. These work together for a pretty good low range. I don't know about how the tires will perform off-road because they are brand-new. We only put them on a week ago—in anticipation of the safari. When she is finished checking us in, she breaks away. As Jean moves to the next rig, she smiles and adds that she'll be watching the rig to see how our combination performs.*

*Anxiety levels begin to rise. Expectation for the day's event keeps people wired and jittery. I can't stand still, and walk from rig to rig to relieve the excitement. It also gives me an opportunity to look at the well-built vehicles lined up for this ride. Stopping at one group of drivers, I hear a few seasoned veterans tell horror stories about having done one spot on another trail called the Dragon's Tail—a particularly difficult obstacle this year because recent heavy rains have seriously washed and eroded it. They look at several new drivers and tell them that today's ride is "going to be real bad, just like the Dragon's Tail." You'll probably take out a **rocker panel\***." The newcomers stamp their feet, and kick at pebbles in agitated excitement. Each driver (experienced or not) is thinking: "Will I wreck something today; will I embarrass myself by not being able to do a section of trail, or is it going to be easy?" All individuals, whether familiar with the trail or not, experience the nervous energy together. It is palpable.*

*There are several moments of nervous silence that seem like days. A guy across from me notes: "It rained just a tad early this morning, that'll keep the dust down today. Good for 'crawling.'" Everyone nods in agreement. Hanging out with other drivers seems to ease the tension. People play jokes, harass each other--like telling each other, "you'll never make it"-- swap stories, or wander around and talk.*

*A Jeep CJ-7 pulls into the line-up. It sits fairly tall on what looks to be a radical suspension set-up. Under the fenders are some knobby Super Swamper mud racing tires. The paint gleams in the sun. But this is not just the gleam from a recent wash and wax, this is the fresh paint gleam that can only be seen on a rig that has not ventured off-road with the paint job yet. It rumbles in a way that reveals a big non-stock engine is hidden under the hood. The group I'm with whispers about the newcomer. I hear someone confide: "Yeh, I've heard he's got an injected 454 under the hood." Another can be heard saying: "Look, he's got a Dana 60 reverse-cut in the rear." Its not long before we walk over to the Jeep for a closer inspection.*

*We introduce ourselves, and ask the driver if he would mind if we take a look at his rig. "Go right ahead; hey let me show you what I just shoe-horned under the hood." With this he opens the hood, revealing the legendary engine transplant. The group offers congratulations on a great job, and then moves around the rig with him. He details each of the modifications, and how they were accomplished. "I've only got one problem though," he admits. "I guess I didn't tighten the bolt on the back corner of the driver's seat well enough because I seem to have lost it." One of the people in the group says: "Hey, I've got something that'll work great." He runs off, returning minutes later with a new bolt. In a*

*flash the seat mount is repaired.*

\* \* \*

Movement among participants begins the process of uniting the group for the upcoming ride. Trail rides are always a communal act;<sup>14</sup> this is evinced by the fact that participants rarely use singular pronouns when referring to their actions during trail events. Rather, the plural "we" frequently peppers conversations and narratives. Because of this communal aspect, getting to know others on one's ride is imperative, not to mention that people—as noted previously—attend the safari just to be with other Rock Crawlers. Consequently people always move and mill about. This interaction functions as a "rite of separation from the previous [non-off-road] world" (Van Gennep, 21).

In this situation, drivers separate themselves from the world by "lining-up" their 4x4s. This act signifies who is part of the trip. Milling about during this time also begins knitting the many drivers into a working group.<sup>15</sup> Such "communication actively engages the participants" (Stoeltje, 1992, 262), knitting the various people into the functioning group that they will need to successfully complete the trail ride (Van Gennep, 10, 21, 23). "The acts of embarking and disembarking, of entering a vehicle...[for a trail ride] are often accompanied by rites of separation at the time of departure and by rites of incorporation upon return" (23).

Such transformations begin to occur as the group lines up for the trail ride and

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<sup>14</sup> See chapter five for more on the social aspects of trail rides.

<sup>15</sup> For more on "making the rounds," see: Roger Abrahams. "An American Vocabulary of Celebrations" (180).

subsequently reaches the threshold of the trail (Driver, 157; Edith Turner & William Blodgett, 14; Van Gennep, 20-1). This is critical because on the trail their lives and vehicles will, in some instances, rest in each other's hands. For the event to run smoothly and safely, a sense of trust between the participants is of premier importance.

Many believe that the social aspect of the *Jeep Safari* is as important as driving one's 4x4 on the trail rides. Participants meet and make friends, and return to the event to be with these friends every year (Chris Stephens, 7/21/1994). During episodes such as this, people experience this "state of *communitas*...[or a] camaraderie that may come about temporarily between fellow liminals" (Myerhoff, 248). *Communitas* is an integral part of the transformation in individuals (245-9).

4x4s line up, people wander or gather in groups, and a sense of confusion seems to reign. Despite the seeming anarchy, the safari is indeed quite structured. Yet to the uninitiated, it appears to be pandemonium (Horse Capture, 10). The *Jeep Safari*, like other festivals is an intricate tangle of planned events:

Such complexity often gives rise to an impression of chaos and disorder, especially to members of modern society trained to isolate the senses and limit communication to visual, literate forms based on principles of sequence. (Stoeltje, 1983, 240)

There is definitely a structure to this event; and it is evidenced when the officials decide that everything is ready. This point is reached when all the drivers have been met and every vehicle has undergone a brief inspection (fig: 6.5). Each official calls for their group to "move-out" over the C.B. Within seconds, 25 to 100 vehicles have been started-up and moved onto the street. After a drive to the trail-head, the group

is ready to embark into the back country.

Before this can be done, several changes need to be made to the rigs, to make them off-roadable. Parking for a few moments at the trail-head allows drivers to get out of their rigs and lock the hubs on their front axles. Next, they let air out of the tires. Now participants are ready to venture into the outback.

### INTO THE OUTBACK: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

*The line-up is informed, via C.B., to "move out" (fig: 6.6). We're positioned near the end of the line-up, so it takes a few minutes before vehicles in front of us pull away. I can smell the exhaust, hear the engines, and see the colors of all the rigs as they pull away. I itch in my seat—hardly able to wait for us to move onto the trail. Finally we get the chance to pull away from our parking spot. People line the streets taking pictures and waving as the group heads through town. Soon, the entire company has driven through town and down the highway to the trail-head. The drive is exciting: each driver introduces himself or herself and what rig they are driving. Drivers tell where they are from—and what club they belong to, if they belong to one. We stop at the trail head, where the group is informed to air down tires, lock hubs, and perform any other last minute preparations. People get out, perform the final requisite tasks before getting back into their 4x4s and shifting their transfer cases into 4-wheel drive.*

*While doing these tasks we shout jokes and comments to each other. Quinn yells to me that the "Easter Egg"—that's what many in the Lone Peak 4-Wheelers call my yellow*





**FIG: 6.6** Becci gets ready to move our Bronco out when the “move out” call comes.

and purple Bronco--won't be able to do this trail today without trouble. He asks with mock concern: “Hey Dave, do you have your tow strap for when you need my help?” Back in his Bronco, Quinn leans out the driver's window, grins wide, and pulls away. I can hear the high-pitched whine from his low gearing as the rig rolls over and through an outcropping of rock that separates the trail from the road. The ride is beginning!

Minutes later, we snake our way through the rugged desert and between the towering stone *fin*s\* common to the desert here. The world completely changes. The houses, streets, and shops of Moab quickly change to sculptured red sandstone monoliths, and orange, brown, and yellow desert sands. Even the air smells different, scented by the sage growing along the trail sides. It's like a different world. I'm awed by the grandeur and beauty around us. Interestingly, the new sights bring a kind of calm. Anxiety about the nature of

*the trail that was experienced during the line-up disappears; the tensions of the work-a-day world are also left far behind. This is what the safari is all about!*

\* \* \*

Phil Howell, a well know off-roader and the editor for *4-Wheel Drive & Sport Utility Magazine*, describes his off-road experience in terms that closely echo my own:

The trail climbed off of the ledge, and became an easy run through pinon pines and junipers. The views in every direction were tremendous...In front and to the right, hoodoo rocks and sandstone fins showed us what we were going to be driving through in a little while...This is what four-wheeling is all about. It's hard to think about troubles at the office or at home when you're out here. (1994, 54)

We are not alone in our comments:

Looking at the terrain, you could tell it was custom-made for four wheelers. It had rocky sections winding among tight trees, water crossings, and serene fern in the heavily wooded sections. The wildflowers crowding along the trail put me into an optical overload. (Muesling, 19)

Most drivers feel such emotions. Jim Broadbent notes: "When I get out there [on trail rides], I just become—you just feel like you're part of nature. You realize that you're part of nature. You're not in control of nature. And I like that feeling" (4/9/1996). Driving through the desert causes many to reflect upon the beautiful topography of which they have become a part. This also aids in the illusion of freedom and escape.

Such excursions often engender feelings of release from the everyday world. It is as if the trail is a new existence. The world gradually fades from one landscape to another as it morphs from streets, houses, and buildings, to trails and their

surrounding sand, stone, and desert flora. This change does not occur all at once, but over a given space near the trail-head:

I think of those few yards...as a physical counterpart of the liminal condition we are trying to understand. Those medial yards belonged simultaneously and equally to both worlds, the [trail] and town; to some extent they belonged to whichever world whoever was treading them belonged to at that moment, which in turn depended to some extent on who they were and in which direction they were going. To that extent, plainly, those different states of being were necessarily coexistent in both time and space. (Turnbull, 60)

Progressing away from Moab, there is a transitional space between the town, which drivers leave behind, and the timeless desertscape they enter. The sense of separation heightens as the vehicles progress from Moab into the raw desert: when the roads have become dirt, and when houses and trees give-way to sage and rock fins. As participants progress farther into the desert, the sense of separation continues to elevate. An atmosphere of companionship amongst these rigorous obstacles lay before drivers as they also take-in the desert's beauty. Negotiating trail difficulties and enjoying the topography become the focus.

Soon participants have forgotten the world behind them. It is as though this is more than a symbolic act; for drivers, the outside world has "ceased to exist" (Turnbull, 67). Their exclusion from the world behind them is so complete that it is "almost [like] drawing a small branch across the path leading from [Moab]...the whole outside world...ceased to exist" (67). "One becomes something else...[and] has an altered state of consciousness, a new perception of oneself or one's socio/physical world, a conversion in awareness" (Myerhoff, 245).

Charlie Copsey has noted that such awareness has never been more evident

to him than while he is participating in trail rides. He has even compared the heightening of these senses, and the rush it produces, to a drug-like experience. For this analogy, he goes so far as calling rock crawling "an addiction" (7/21/1994).

While on a trail ride, the world for Rock Crawlers is that trail. Speech reflects the unity all involved share. Despite the variance in social or cultural backgrounds, participants' conversations concern the same topics: the landscape, the vehicles, and each other. Indeed, the very language each participant uses is similar. At rest stops, discussions brim with comments about the world the group has entered. Congratulations or ribbings are shared with each other concerning driving performances. Much of the discourse concentrates upon forthcoming challenges and driving advice is given and taken freely. Others admire the landscape or comment on the unpredictable desert weather.

All interaction centers upon the ordeal. To speak of the outside world is an unarticulated taboo; people often refrain from mentioning the business world, or its responsibilities, for fear of ruining this liberating experience.

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*The beauty of the territory around me combines with the excitement of driving—with my compatriots—into this challenging and new landscape. Large sandstone fins and oddly-shaped balancing rocks seem to hem-in our path. But this is just an illusion; the trail winds between them, revealing more hidden and unseen challenges. Each new difficulty is exquisite, giving me an anxiety that is only released as I figure out how to negotiate and complete it. My senses are heightened, every rock, gully, or patch of sand on the trail*

*releases a tumult of calculations: "How hard do I hit this? Which direction is best? Should I place the drivers' side tire on that rock, or the gully beside it? Which angle gives best traction; which gives the best performance for the group?"*

*The process is sweet. It requires total concentration and is mentally taxing, but physically I am alive. I never feel so quickened and energized as when I drive during the safari. Sometimes I wonder what I must look like while here. I look around at other participants--each looks like a child seeing a carnival for the first time. Each of us just itches to get onto that next challenge. Eyes gleaming with excited wonder, we get out of our rigs to watch others try the same challenges. Secretly we wish the carnival will never end because when the fun is over we know nothing this exciting can follow. So, we forget the world and think only of the trail in front of us.*

*The "red rock" desert is beautiful (figs: 6.7, 6.8). The sand is warm and you can smell the pungent-sweet aroma of the sage in the air as you drive. The gentle breeze can be heard whispering through the stunted scrub brush dotting the desert sands between the patches of slick rock\*. You can even taste the dry dusty air in your mouth. With the top off of the Bronco, the sun beats down warmly on my head and shoulders. The desert reminds me that I am within its bounds through all five of my senses.*

*When we get a chance to explore these areas--during one of the frequent rest relaxation breaks--I meet-up with Quinn, Jake Rex, and a few other friends. We climb an outcropping of rocks and check out some of the long distance views. Becci climbs some rocks a few feet away, looking at a bunch of cacti growing from some sand in the cavity of a rock. Off in the distance, others walk along a cliff. A few people down below have opened*

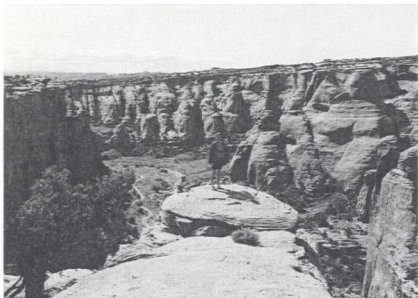


FIG: 6.7 Becci stands on an outcropping of rock high above the trail--which can be seen winding below.

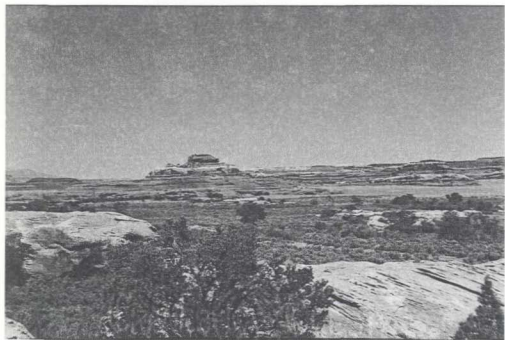


FIG: 6.8 From a slickrock outcropping, a trail can be seen cutting through the sage-covered desert floor.

*the tailgate to their rig and are sitting on it while eating a snack. Kids chase each other around the desert foliage. Soon the trail leader signals for us to get in our rigs so the group can head out.*

\* \* \*

The liberating effects of trail rides, like a drug, gives excitement and energy to the participants: "but if the fatigue was real, so was the stimulation we received from all this work, it was as though the harder we worked the more energy we were given...that was when I felt clean and whole, free of all doubt and worry" (Turnbull, 70). Although the extreme desert climate combines with arduous driving conditions to drain the vigor from the participants, a new sense of energy and exhilaration imbues the people—it renews them. This energy is difficult for participants to articulate. They tell others over the C.B. how tired they are, but ask "is anyone up for a midnight run up *Moab Rim* [trail]" (heard over the C.B. after a trail ride, 1996 safari), or any other of the numerous trails.

As the trail ride ends, people are worn with the difficulties of the day. Yet the activities do not stop.

Many performers, after a strenuous [trail ride] will go out to eat, drink, and talk—often boisterously. Someone who doesn't know [off-roaders] wonders at how much energy they have left. But these celebratory bouts are not really after the [trail ride] but part of it—a way of cooling down, of reintegrating into ordinary social life" (Schechner & Appel, 5).

Participants return to town from their trail rides with a new sense of accomplishment, a sense of wonder, and a feeling of excitement. Additionally, they have become more deeply integrated into the rock crawling culture due to the interaction with

fellow drivers, and as we shall see, performance (Smith, 167; Sekaquaptewa, 37-8).

## PERFORMANCE & CONVENTION

Performance is inextricably linked to the safari experience (Stoeltje, 1987, 138-9). A driver's sociable behavior and the ability to negotiate certain sections of trail within parameters set by the group is a deciding factor for status, not one's social station in the outside world. Learning to perform within these parameters, and how to "push" (or not push) them is the determining factor for the notoriety and respect of being a "big dog," or hot-shot driver. Therefore, the ability to perform well as a driver and as a member of the group is of paramount importance.

Participating in a trail ride provides the opportunity to test the mettle of driver and machine while in the company of peers. Often, interaction and help from these peers is imperative for performance upon certain sections of the trail. For enthusiasts, this is a leading motivator for travelling great distances to attend this event. The *Jeep Safari* also allows for public displays of driving prowess, and intimate interaction with others in the group. Furthermore, it provides a situation where performance can be evaluated. This helps to establish a performer's place within the community.

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*It is a trail ride during the 1994 safari; Becci and I are doing Steel Bender trail with the Lone Peak 4-Wheelers. Rounding a bend in the trail, we find the group in front of us has*



*stopped at a particularly difficult obstacle. Quinn--a few vehicles ahead of us today--is completing a perfect climb up a rugged hill in his Bronco. Following him, a Jeep Wrangler struggles, getting stuck at a nasty corner in the trail. The driver rocks the rig back and forth to dislodge its stuck front tire. His efforts are not successful. Approximately twenty rigs are parked along the path behind him. Drivers are talking in small groups between these 4x4s. Others have left their vehicles behind and have trotted over to the action on-foot. They do so to gain better vantage points from which to watch the excitement provided by the various rigs as the drivers attempt this challenge.*

*I learn that this obstacle is called the Dragon's Tail. It is one of the "horrors" mentioned during the line-up for the earlier trail. This section gets its name from the fact that as drivers attempt to climb up the steep and rugged terrain, they must turn to the left, then bank sharply to the right, hop their rigs up and over a rock that forms a small wall in the hill, and finally head further to the right and up a steep embankment. (This last right-hand turn is where the stuck Wrangler driver still struggles.) To succeed, the lines that must be taken resemble a dragon's winding tail. All these factors must be taken into account as drivers climb the steep hill, which is covered in loose rocks, sand, and gravel. The fact that large sand covered boulders lay strewn about the edges of the path makes the Dragon's Tail even more difficult. One mistake could lead to ruined tires, body damage--or scraped paint.*

*Becci and I climb down from the Bronco and scramble into good positions to watch the action. The Jeep finally backs away and takes a **chicken route\***. A large crowd assembles as a full-sized Bronco attempts the challenging trail section. People cheer and scream as the truck bounces up, over, and around the rocks. Yet, time after time it fails to*

*reach the top of the hill. The driver seems to ignore shouts of encouragement as he nervously listens to advice from the spotters. They shout commands and their hands wave with signals. He acknowledges them and then attempts to follow their information. His efforts are thwarted and his rig finally bounces to a stop after uselessly spinning his tires on the dust and rock. Someone asks if he's "trying to make [his] own dust storm?" He nods with a smile, "I'm doing my best!"*

### Spotters

There is an unstated assumption that the more experienced drivers will take up authoritative positions to guide neophytes and other individuals needing assistance through rugged trail locations (fig: 6.9-6.14).<sup>16</sup> In fact, some locations necessitate spotters to inform all drivers, regardless of their driving experience. Ed Isaacson, a talented driver, notes:

*[Sledgehammer trail] was really...tough hard core, technical, demanding, 4-wheeling. By far the roughest I have ever done. It was a different experience than Surprise Canyon. We needed lots of help from our buddies again, with spotters on every corner, lots of rock moving and in general again working together to get the group through the rocks. (Trail journal, italics added)*

These difficult driving situations are where trust becomes most crucial.

Drivers must have unwavering confidence in the abilities of their spotters. In

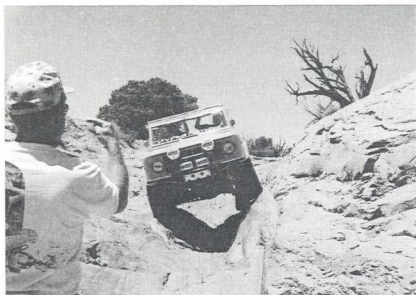
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<sup>16</sup> This process tends to refute the idea that liminality creates "equal individuals" (Victor Turner, 1969, 96). These spaces *do* jumble the normal social order. Yet there are still authority figures and followers; these strata could not be extant in a socially levelled milieu.

some instances instinct will tell a driver to do one thing, while the spotter tells him/her another. In other words, the terrain may look like it requires one approach, while in reality, that approach would result in failure and possible vehicle damage. "When you venture off-road, take along a trustworthy spotter. A spotter has a better view of the terrain immediately around your truck and warns you of any impending danger" (McGee, 41). Good spotters help drivers through these difficult passages.

A driver's faith in the abilities, and better visual angles, of the spotter keeps him/her from damaging the vehicle or hurting its occupants. Spotters giving bad advice can cause serious problems for drivers and their vehicles. Jeff Dixon learned this on the *Rubicon* trail when an inexperienced spotter guided him onto an immense rock. This resulted in Jeff bending his 4x4's front **drive shaft**\*. The accident could have left him broken-down on the trail, possibly needing to be towed out. Luckily, he was able to take the drive shaft off, while on the trail, and fix the damage enough to finish the trip. The twisted part was later taken to a shop and straightened.

Choosing spotters from a group that undergoes an inversion in the social strata may appear difficult. But the process ensues smoothly, occurring in three ways. (1) Drivers will specifically ask an individual upon whom they know they can rely. I cannot count the number of times that I have asked Quinn to spot for me. His driving expertise is unquestioned among those knowing him; whenever I get into a jam, I know that I can count on Quinn. Ed Isaacson has noted that he simply could not have done *Surprise Canyon* "without Chris [Stephens'] help; that was one tough run. He helped our group get through--showed us how to do it" (4/1996).



**FIG: 6.9** Jack Neilsen guides me through *The Wedgie, Poison Spider Mesa* trail. (Courtesy Becci Neal)



**FIG: 6.10** Jack's hand signals are all that I have to drive by because I can't see the trail directly in front of me. Spotters are important here; following instinct alone, drivers might slide into the wedge. (Courtesy Becci Neal)



**FIG: 6.11** Spotters help a Jeep climb a ledge on the *Guardian* trail in Arizona. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com/](http://www.off-road.com/))



**FIG: 6.12** A spotter guides a Jeep through a tight spot on *Wolf Run*, in New Mexico. (Courtesy [www.off-road.com](http://www.off-road.com))



FIG: 6.13 A spotter guides a Wrangler as it climbs one of the many tests of *Sledgehammer*. (Courtesy Jim Cole)



FIG: 6.14 Chip Brox spots for a Toyota while leading the *Gold Bar Rim* trail, near Moab.

(2) Often the trail leader will spot. Since trail leaders are responsible for getting the entire group through safely, they assume this responsibility. They also delegate the responsibility to individuals they know can be trusted. When Chip Brox lead the *Seven Mile Rim* trail during the 1992 *Jeep Safari* he made sure to spot for neophyte drivers during the challenges on this relatively easy trail.

(3) In some instances, an experienced driver steps forward on their own. Drivers listen to these volunteers based upon observations of their driving skills or reputation. Usually, only those competent and knowledgeable in their driving skills step forward. One driver during the 1995 safari told a "wanna-be" spotter to "get the hell away from my truck!" The would-be spotter was an inexperienced driver who fancied himself to be more competent than he actually was. Knowing this—having observed this individual's driving during the course of the trail ride—the driver dismissed him.

Despite the subversion of the normal social strata common to the safari—and on trail rides in particular—a hierarchy quickly emerges. This is actually an integral part of a trail ride, which employs

structures of its own; but these are different from the structures of society, and they are often utilized to emphasize homogeneity [and] equality...when compared with the heterogeneous, status-marked, name conscious intelligence of the social order. (Driver, 159)

In situations when drivers or vehicles are at risk, specific people are chosen—or come forward—who have the ability to act as teachers, guardians, or to simply make sure that safety is ensured. Their authority is not derived from the "outside world."

Rather, it hinges upon their knowledge and performance while on the trail.<sup>17</sup> Many drivers are simply known to be experienced; their opinions and practice is important to the trail ride.

### Performance

*The group slowly moves through the Dragon's Tail. Many drivers fail to negotiate the passage and opt for a bypass, or "chicken route." John Heer, a friend of mine—who is doing a trail ride for the first time—nervously asks me which lines to "hit" to make it. I show him what looks best. Such information is learned by looking at the lay of the terrain, and watching how other trucks react to the land during their attempts. As John climbs into his Jeep Wrangler, I move into a good spotting position. He nervously glances at me and then sets his Jeep into a good location at the bottom of the hill. I wave him on. He takes a breath, waits a minute to gather his senses, and then starts off. I yell orders as he inches forward. I wave my hands this way and that, pointing out where his wheels need to be placed. I yell: "Move to your left." "Bank sharp right as you hit that rock!"*

*My stomach is in a knot. "Get over or you'll get hung-up in this loose crap here!" I point to a section of rock: "Put your tire here!" This section is tougher than it looks. What if I guide him wrong? I get in as close as I can without getting in the way of his rig. I'm thinking: "If I'm this tense he must be wired!"*

*The Jeep bounces and scratches over the rock ledge half-way up and John flashes*

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<sup>17</sup> Much like the earlier-mentioned Native Americans learning drumming.



*a determined glance as he reaches me. I can see his hands tightly gripping the steering wheel. This is what they call "white knuckling." I shriek: "Go for it! Go for it! Go for it!" as he passes me. "Holy shit, he's doing it on the first try!"*

*His first attempt is flawless and he emerges from his Jeep at the top of the hill triumphant! I'm jumping up and down screaming: "No way! That's the best ride today!" The two of us aren't the only ones jumping around--every one else is impressed by this newcomer. For a moment the whole group is united in a cheer, people come by and clap John's back. His execution has been one of the day's best; his day has been made.*

*Having helped John reach the top, I descend the hill and climb into the Bronco. I start the engine and get ready to go. Becci opts to mount the hill on foot and take pictures of me as I do the climb. All of a sudden the knot in my stomach returns--only way worse! I notice my palms are sweating. How long have they been like this? Taking a deep breath, I approach the bottom of the hill. Quinn--spotting--waves me on. Wanting to have an impressive climb, I slowly manoeuvre up the hill. I want this to be a good show, and think: "I've got to do well, I can't let a greenie like John show me up."*

*The pressure is really on. I inch from one rock to another, flashing my eyes from the trail to Quinn, and then to Becci, positioned nearby with the camera. Just as I think this is going to be a show-piece climb, the truck heaves to the driver's side and my wheels spin in a fruitless effort to find traction. Dust and chunks of rock fly. I ease off the gas and come to a halt. My perfect run has been ruined. John stands above me on the trail, points, and laughs.*

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The ability to respectably negotiate obstacles is a prime goal among participants. Those who do not attempt to drive in this manner are known as "rednecks," "ya-hoos," or even "assholes" (Matt Smith, 4/4/1996). There are several "do's and don't's" that must be respected to be evaluated and esteemed as a "big dog," or in other words, an exceptional driver. Drivers assert their driving prowess and participant level within the group by adhering to these "laws." It is not merely who can get over an obstacle and who takes a chicken route; many factors play in the aesthetics of driving performances (Nylund, 102-135).

A driver's effort to negotiate obstacles can be evaluated, just as a figure skater's performance can be rated while in the Olympics. Despite what many people think, the object is not to hit obstacles as fast or hard as possible. In fact, the best way to approach most obstacles is by going as slowly as possible. Negotiating one's 4x4 in ways that highlight the rig's abilities, and the owner's driving expertise, (often judged as driver/vehicle unity) is the way to "go for the show." This does not mean that drivers constantly try to "perform" the trail. Knowing when and where to perform are also part of the dynamic. And drivers who needlessly beat on the trail or their vehicle are not generally respected. The abbreviated list below comprises the criteria for judging a driver's ability to render the trail. Although many of these concepts have been discussed in previous chapters it is important to review them again in terms of evaluating performance:

1. **TIRE SPIN**

The ability to "do" sections of trail with minimal tire spin is admirable. The less drivers spin tires and tear up the trail the better. Most drivers are ecologically minded, so this is a must. Having a "lead foot" is not a way to impress other participants.

**2. SPEED**

Speed is not valued. In fact, going through bad obstacles as *slowly* as possible is a good way to show off. "Doing" tough trail sections without the aid of momentum highlights driver skills and vehicle modification. The land is also impacted less. Knowing when to creep and when to "get into it" is an art that many drivers fail to learn. Developing this ability is a goal many drivers spend years striving to attain. "Take it slow. Speed kills, or at least it hurts your 4x4. If you lay off the throttle, you and your truck have a much better chance of making it home in one piece" (McGee, 41).

**3. CHOOSING CORRECT LINES**

"Hitting" obstacles in the right place makes traversing them easier. Such driving impacts the trail less, and makes the possibility of damage to the vehicle more remote, thus showing respect for the land and the vehicle. Hitting a section of trail badly, and then "hammering" on the land and the vehicle to get through engenders a lack of respect. One way to excite other participants is to hit an obstacle on the toughest lines possible and/or get one's tire(s) hanging in the air. After the "show," the driver must pull up and over the obstacle cleanly, without tire spin. A driver must know his/her vehicle intimately. If the attempt ends in getting stuck, breaking the rig, or chewing up the trail, people are not likely to be impressed.

**4. DRIVING OFF THE TRAIL**

There is no better way to lose the respect of other drivers, and cause anger, than to leave the trail. Many trails are kept open by the BLM\* specifically for off-roaders and other multiple-use communities. Leaving a trail can literally endanger future use of all the trails.

**5. KNOWING YOUR VEHICLE**

Knowing a vehicle's abilities and drawbacks is a must. Knowing the abilities of a vehicle and pushing them to their limits without exceeding them is an admirable quality. There is nothing more aggravating than waiting for extended periods of time as someone with an ill-equipped vehicle repeatedly attempts a section of trail that they cannot do. Conversely, having a vehicle that is ultra-modified and failing to attempt difficult sections of a trail also raises eyebrows.

**6. KNOWING WHEN TO QUIT**

There is little respect for drivers who repeatedly hammer away at sections of trail that a lack of driving expertise or vehicle modifications keep them from completing. On the other hand, drivers who know when to quit, back off, and take a "chicken route" are respected. In

fact, Chris Stephens has noted that some days drivers are more "in-touch" with their rigs, and other days they are not. On the days they are not, they may fail to accomplish obstacles that they had done with ease the day before. Chris noted that he passes-up obstacles or quits after a single try during these "down days."

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*I'm still attempting my climb the Dragon's Tail and my second try is as fruitless as the first. By now, it's obvious that I am having trouble because my spinning tires have rained dust and rocks over the crowd. Additionally, I back onto a rock and scrape the paint on the rear bumper, which I had painted only days before. (It serves me right for painting it just before the safari.) The crowd can't resist throwing playful jeers my way. Someone in the crowd yells, asking if I need a "tow rope for that old sheet metal."*

*Knowing that I have already dashed any hopes of having the ultimately impressive climb, I back all the way down. This is my third and final attempt, so I hit it in a matter-of-fact fashion--no showy stuff this time! The truck heaves back and forth. I impact the ledge half-way up and the front tires bounce up and over (figs: 6.15-6.18). The crowd cheers as I grind to a stop at the top. I have finally made it.*

*Climbing out of the truck, I brace myself for the inevitable jeers. Among other questions, they ask if I was trying to "break-in" my new tires. But my true embarrassment comes when Dan Wynkoop drives his Jeep Wrangler down the hill--and then backs up it without spinning a tire (fig. 6.19). As he backs up the hill past me, he flashes a grin that needs no words to explain.*

*I have been bested--backwards!*

*Following Dan, Shannon Shirk cruises his Bronco up the obstacle. He goes for the*



**FIG: 6.15** After two unsuccessful tries on the *Dragon's Tail*, I back all the way down to the bottom and try for a third and final time. This was much harder than it looks! (Courtesy Becci Neal)



**FIG: 6.16** Half-way up the *Dragon's Tail* during my third attempt. (Courtesy Becci Neal)



FIG: 6.17 Bouncing up and over the ledge 3/4 of the way up the *Dragon's Tail*. (Courtesy Becci Neal)



FIG: 6.18 Only the rear bumper got scraped; everything else was fine. Well, maybe my ego got bruised.



**FIG: 6.19** Dan Wynkoop backs his Jeep Wrangler up the *Dragon's Tail* to rub my troubles in.



**FIG: 6.20** Shannon Shirk gets "air borne" off the ledge on the *Dragon's Tail*. (Courtesy Aimee Shirk)

*show, and gives his rig a hefty boost of gas just as he hits the rock ledge. His front end shoots up nearly five feet into the air as he bounces over (fig. 6.20). His attempt, also, has been flawless. For the rest of the day, friends--new and old--clap me on the shoulder and ask: "Hey, how 'bout that old Dragon's Tail?" Even after I flawlessly perform other sections of trail, some of which are more difficult, people shoot down the moment by playfully mentioning the fateful Dragon's Tail.*

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Harassing and digging at others is not intended as derogatory. Such behavior can extend for months or years and is accepted as affable play. This is, in fact, one way the group asserts an individual's acceptance. It does not hurt feelings; rather, such play maintains the camaraderie among group members. No accepted members of the society are free from such play because even the best drivers can occasionally hit a section of trail poorly. Many even have "off days" when they "hit everything wrong" (Chris Stephens, 7/20/1994). Such days are not necessarily indicators of poor driver expertise or vehicle modification, because the driver might have flawlessly negotiated the same trail the day before. Such disparity is common. Knowledge of this fact adds tension and expectation to a ride, even if it is on a trail that is often traversed by each driver.

The crowd reacts differently if someone has been judged by their fellow drivers to be a trouble-maker. If the driver begins to unnecessarily hammer away at a difficult obstacle with their vehicle, the crowd might purposely encourage them. During the 1993 *Jeep Safari*, I witnessed--and participated in--a crowd as it urged



an offensive driver on. The driver was pushed to attempt feats that would destroy his vehicle. Between yells, members of the crowd muttered to each other: "I hope he blows up his differential," "what an ass, he's going to **scatter** his transfer case," "look at him go; what an idiot," or "I hope he puts his fan through his radiator."

The difference between a positive or negative reaction of the crowd rests in their acceptance or rejection of the driver, based upon the driver's trail etiquette. By goading individuals into destroying their 4x4s on obstacles, the group effectively ejects these offensive drivers from their midst. After the 4x4 has broken down, the group moves on—leaving the trouble-maker to be towed out by the support drivers. If the vehicle fails to break down, the group has at least displayed unity in its attitude towards this person. In some cases, an extremely obnoxious driver will be asked by the trail leader (acting in-behalf of the group) not to continue further. For instance, during the 1993 Jeep Safari, Chip Brox, leader of the *Gold Bar Rim* trail was forced to ask a drunk driver to leave the group.

If a valued member of the group breaks down, drivers do almost anything to help them. Once again, it is not who or what individuals are in the outside world that generates such reactions from fellow drivers. These responses are based upon views established during trail ride(s).

## RETURNING TO TOWN

At the end of the trail ride, participants unlock their hubs and shift their transfer cases back into 2-wheel drive. Some air their tires back to street pressures with air compressors built into their rigs (fig: 6.21). All eventually make their way back to Moab, where the redressive, or integration, process ensues (Victor Turner, 1991, 10, 13, 17). People return to town from the liminal outback experience and search for places to mentally and physically cool down. Old friends, and new ones made during the day, find places out of the sun to relax; they swap tales of the day's heroics or blunders that occurred on the land.<sup>18</sup>

The specific locations for such interaction are not as important as the fact that friends sense a need to be together and share the experiences they had together that day. Rock Crawlers have described the interval after a trail ride as a time to "regroup back at the restaurant, and [do] some required bragging about our four-wheeling feats" (Merritt, 64). These gatherings are used to re-live all of the exciting moments of the day.

My close friends regularly go to either a local pizzeria, or southwestern style restaurant.<sup>19</sup> The *Lone Peak 4-Wheelers* have gone to a Mexican restaurant; during the 1996 *Jeep Safari* the club's meeting place was a group of campers parked in a

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas W. Dunk discusses such gatherings as a chance to "discuss the [day's activities], or just shoot the shit" (72).

<sup>19</sup> "The rite of eating and drinking together...is clearly a rite of incorporation, of physical union, and has been called a sacrament of communion" (Van Gennep, 29).



**FIG: 6.21** Braydn Tanner helps his father, Brian, air tires up following a trail ride near Moab.

trailer park near the northern edge of town. Tired from trail rides that can last up to ten hours, participants seek places where the nervous tension that builds while driving through the rough desert terrain can be sloughed away. The tone is light, but energetic, as individuals enlarge their experiences into stories of off-road heroics. If anyone in the group had difficulty on a section of trail they are harassed or ribbed. Sometimes such mistakes are not easily forgotten—and are used by friends for playful jabs in subsequent discussions or get-togethers.

The relaxed atmosphere continues to build the sense of community. But this sense of “community” is somewhat different than that shared in the line-up, where participants come together before the ride to release pre-performance anxiety. After the rides, friends unite to share “the contents of group experiences...[which] are

replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful" (Victor Turner, 1991, 13).<sup>20</sup> This "reflexive period" generates constructive knowledge (17). Participants "recognize [their] potential for competition...and other dysfunctional [behavior]. But [they] also recognize...[their] potential for being something [positive]" (Turnbull, 75).

Sitting around restaurant tables—or even a camp fire—groups laughingly retell the stories made during the day. Each participant asserts the significance of his/her actions. Of premier importance to this situation is that the strengths and weaknesses of the drivers' performances are discussed. "Cool-down and aftermath phases of performance are...important,...they can be a slow unfolding process involving how performances are evaluated, how the experience of performing is used by the community" (Schechner & Appel, 5). In a lighthearted atmosphere, participants are free to learn from the views or opinions of others. Sharing the day's activities within the safety of friendship helps each to bask in the warmth of praise, or review errors with those they trust most. Each is positive that future attempts will be even better than today's.

An individual's acceptance within the community can be judged by who s/he spends this important time with. If an individual is not accepted by the group, then s/he will not be asked to relax with them after the ride. As we ate in a restaurant one night during the 1994 *Jeep Safari*, a lone driver stepped into the dining area and was seated. One of my companions commented that this man was not liked by those on

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<sup>20</sup> For more discussion concerning these scenes of "promoting social cohesion" and "positively reinforcing performance," see: Jerome Smith, 167.

many trail rides because of his arrogant attitude. I watched the driver to see how he spent his cool-down period. I was not surprised to find that the individual dined alone. Knowing that people who rode with him usually had little respect for the man, I realized that few would want to share the intimate hours following a ride with him.

I asked my companions what he did to engender such a lack of respect. They commented that he regularly failed to follow spotters' advice,<sup>21</sup> that he rarely spotted for others, and that he infrequently stopped to help drivers who were in trouble. In short, he did almost nothing to contribute to the ride's pleasurable or communal experience. Failing to engender respect in his peers resulted in his spending what could have been a rewarding evening with friends, alone.

## GOING HOME

*It is late Sunday afternoon, following the 1994 Jeep Safari. We are filling-up at a gas station in Green River, Utah, about an hour north-west of Moab (fig: 6.1). Like Becci and myself, everyone in the other vehicles of our convoy is quiet. All are exhausted from the last few days' activities. Having left Moab at noon, we explored a trail north of town on the way out; we are dusty and extremely tired. Quinn silently gasses-up his Bronco at the pump on the other side of the gas-island from me. Jake and Patrice Rex—who attended the safari for part of their honeymoon—are topping off the gas tank in their Jeep Cherokee. No one says a word. I listen to the pump ping as each gallon flowing into my tank registers. It*

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<sup>21</sup> Thus wasting time and unnecessarily "beating upon" his Jeep and the land.

*throws me into a daze. Scenes from the desert keep haunting my mind's eye--the sandstone monoliths, the people I've met, the challenges...*

*Heading further north along U.S. Highway 6, we slowly drive through the desert and over the mountains towards home (fig: 6.1). For me, this is the hardest part of the trip. The monotony of the paved drive contrasts sharply with the off-road excitement we have had. The road feels too smooth. Way too smooth. The sights are going past too quickly; there's no feeling of connection or interaction with them. My thoughts drift back to the safari. New friends flash through my mind, along with the group who I usually do the trails with. I relive the excitement of the past few days in my mind; harrowing scenes flash. I wonder: "How many of the returning drivers actually pay attention to the road?" If I am indicative of the group, I guess that only a few do.*

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As is common among participants returning from festive events, there is

a certain let-down, a kind of post-depression...There is a melancholy feeling because you realize you won't see that combination of special friends...together again. You know it was a special time attended by special people and now everyone has gone his separate way. (Horse Capture, 54)

Some Rock Crawlers note experiencing feelings of "sadness" while coming home from a trail ride (Ed Isaacson, trail journal: May 11-16, 1995). Amid the elated memories of adventures shared with friends, creeps a post-safari let-down. The events recently left behind tend to make the routine activities of day-to-day life seem

pale and lifeless. The exceptional world of the safari no longer exists,<sup>22</sup> it has been left behind as participants venture back to their homes.

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*As Becci and I drive off Interstate 15 and into Provo, Utah, the town where we live, nothing seems to look the same. It is as though the experience in Moab has changed me. Somehow the town, and all the pressures from school and work, seem insignificant. The event in Moab has shown that life is not about work and bills; rather, it's about making friends, being together with family, challenging ourselves, and basking in the beauty of nature. "Next year the Dragon's Tail will not be a problem," I silently vow! I also feel a sense of accomplishment while thinking of the trails I drove flawlessly. The realization that I am home begins to dawn on me and I loathe going back to the grind.*

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Trail rides such as those offered during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari* venture deep into the back country, offering Rock Crawlers chances to slip free of the social confines imposed by general society and to feel "apart together" (Huizinga, 12). Not only is this situation liberating to the individual participants, but it provides them with chances to assert their membership within the community through interaction and performance. This "apart" from the world while together experience takes place, and is particular to, the outback areas where Rock Crawlers take their rigs (Huizinga, 10, 14). Due to this resulting dynamic, these expeditions are the crux of the *Jeep Safari*

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<sup>22</sup> In efforts to extend the safari world into all aspects of their lives, many Rock Crawlers move to Moab permanently. They believe that by living in Moab, they can enjoy the spectacular local trails at any time.

festivities. For the community collectively, these back country experiences create an opportunity for the liminal phase, providing participants with chances to experiment with group-based ideals. It also strengthens group centered paragon and perceptions.

\* \* \*

*A week after the 1994 Jeep Safari, Becci and I are spending an evening with Quinn and his girlfriend Angela Shumway. As we lounge around the living room in his condo, engrossed in conversation, he pulls out a video tape and pushes it into his VCR. I smile, already knowing what it is. Minutes later, we relax as images Angela videotaped during the safari flash on the television screen. It's all there but the desert smells. We can see friends joking with us and driving their 4x4s; our favorite obstacles loom ahead. Even time spent hiking in the desert is there for us to watch. We relive the Moab experience.*

*Pressures drain--melt--away! The work-a-day world is gone and I am driving on those trails right now. I notice that I unconsciously twist and tense, and use body english, as if these actions will help me drive the trail better. We critique each other's taped performances. Quinn comments on Jake's driving techniques: "He does real well, but he'd get better front wheel travel if he unhooked his front sway bar," he muses. We lapse once again into reverie. I glance at Quinn and know that I am not alone. Yes! For a few moments, we are transported back to that exceptional world.*



## CONCLUSION

I think we have to teach people in all aspects of off-road and off-site use of the land—whether it be mountain biking, whether it be Jeeping, whether it be hiking, backpacking—proper and rightful use of the desert-country of south-east Utah. That's very important. We have to teach people how to use the country. And if we do that, the next generation and the next generation of off-road 4-wheel enthusiasts will have the same rights and privileges that we do. If we don't do that, that privilege and right is going to be taken away from us. (Chip Brox, 4/7/1996)

Performers are not passive, unreflecting creatures who simply respond to the dictates of tradition or the physical and social environment. They interpret both traditions and social settings, actively transforming both in the course of their performances. (Briggs, 7)

The previous chapters elucidate how Rock Crawlers perceive the non-urban physical environment of the American west. Each section, and its two chapters investigates Rock Crawlers and their interactive relationship with the "back country" or "outback" environment. Section one discovers that Rock Crawlers construct outback places from non-urban spaces. Such actions are the result of—and result in—specific metaphor-based processes. Chapter one shows that Rock Crawlers are one of myriad communities valuing the west's non-urban landscapes. As a recreationally-based community, they seek out these places for their beautiful vistas, and the escape, relaxation, and excitement that can be had within these visually stunning locations. These desires regularly throw them into conflict with other communities who value the back country for their own reasons.

In chapter two we learn that the outback is bounded and separated through mentally-

held maps. These maps are comprised of culturally-specific names and conjure histories, vistas, and specific challenges to those familiar with them. This process creates places which are understood and known in this special way only by Rock Crawlers. A passion for both these culturally significant places, and vehicles which are potentially damaging to them, causes pressure from within the group. This clash elicits specific behavior-modifying activities within the community that attempt to mediate these inevitable problems.

Section two looks at rock crawling rigs as a way to further our study of the group's perceptions of the outback environment. Chapter three shows that outback interaction is reflected through one's vehicle. Mechanical modifications to the rigs are pragmatic answers to the rugged nature of the outback. And the colors, paint schemes, and decorative additions made to the 4x4s are answers to perceptions concerning the overwhelming immensity of these places. Thus, vehicle modifications are reactions to attitudes and experiences involving these places; both *practical* and *mythical* values concerning the back country environment provide the impetus for vehicle modification

In chapter four we learn that the creation of a praiseworthy vehicle not only signifies mastery of a group-based "build-up" grammar, but asserts a cognizance of the group's landscape-based metaphors. *Restricted* and *elaborated* construction codes help builders to bring their vehicle modifications into harmony with the demands of the outback environment. These codes determine the suspension, drive train, carburetion, and safety changes needed to build 4x4s capable of withstanding the rigors of extensive recreational use in the outback. Unique morphological variations in these vehicles signal the different needs of each builder. Many builders construct their 4x4s with specific outback locations or challenges in mind. Thus, some rigs are built more radically than others (fig: C.1). Yet



**FIG: C.1** Jim Cole ventures into some of the most rugged terrain in western America; the form of his Jeep reflects Jim's rigorous driving needs. (Courtesy Jim Cole)

all reflect the belief that the outback exists as a place of physical challenge.

Section three investigates the outback as a location for social interaction. Expanses of the Western American mountain and desert topography serve as locations for festival, ritual, and play. Chapter five finds that the outback becomes a platform for highly ritualized communal fellowship, performance, and play, while escaping the urban sphere. Rules governing these excursions create a place of order, cooperation, and community. The outback, then, is not seen as an escape from social order, rather, it is an escape into a more ordered place. It exists beyond the maelstrom of current urban violence, confusion, and anarchy. As such, it is a conservative social force.

Chapter six comprises my experience(s) as a trail ride participant during the *Moab Easter Jeep Safari*. The discussion attempts to portray the excitement and energy

associated with the back country. This excitement comes from the liminalesque escape from everyday life, driving one's own 4x4 on challenging trails, enjoying the beauty of the outback, and being with family and friends.

## JIM COLE'S STORY

While conducting business for *Mountain West Off-Road Supply*, I heard a story that refused to be forgotten, not because of its dramatic plot, nor for its unusual performance, but because its content exemplified—if not united—the various threads comprising this study of the Rock Crawling community. The story unfolded in October, 1997, during a visit to Jim Cole's office, at *Dimension Off-Road*, in Salt Lake City. He was detailing a recent rock crawling adventure that he had taken to California's *Sledgehammer* and *Jackhammer* trails while I thumbed through some pictures he had taken during the trail rides.<sup>1</sup> Somehow our conversation turned from the trails and the pictures to a discussion of off-road etiquette.

Jim began a narrative concerning a trail ride he had lead several years earlier that was marred by the presence of a particular individual. He stressed that the driver was not overtly rude; in fact his demeanor was relatively easy-going. However, the problems he caused were catastrophic enough to ruin the ride for most of the other participants that day; and as the trail leader Jim had felt responsible for the failed venture. Sitting in his office years later, he still felt a twinge of regret about the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of these pictures appear on previous pages.

Thinking of Ed Isaacson's "incident" on the *Behind the Rocks* trail,<sup>2</sup> I asked Jim what this participant could have done to engender such an adverse affect within the group. He noticeably tensed while remembering how the driver neglected to help others at difficult spots, did not listen to spotters as he attempted difficult obstacles, and "used far too much gas pedal" on those difficult sections of trail. "His answer to every challenge was to romp on [the gas pedal]. He had a decent [vehicle] but I don't think he knows how to drive!" (11/1997). The bad situation was made worse when this driver attempted a challenge which Jim, as the trail leader, had specifically asked participants to avoid. The ride had been "long and tiring, and we didn't want anyone to get into trouble. We wanted to get back into town to relax. Some people had a long drive ahead of them to get home; they had to go to work the next day" (11/1997).

Ignoring other drivers who had quickly left their vehicles to spot for him, the driver gunned his rig through the obstacle. Jim's worst fears were realized when the attempt failed, rolling the rig in the process. The group could not leave him there, and spent several hours involved in a complex and dangerous extrication procedure. Jim noted: "We should have just left the rig there for him to have it towed out professionally, but you *just don't* do that" (11/1997). Agitatedly, Jim furthered that during the extraction the driver never helped, and that when the rig was righted, he "drove off without a 'thank you' or *anything*" (11/1997). Jim concluded by commenting that many participants felt justifiably miffed.

The narrative stuck with me because it unites the various themes comprising this study: conceptualizations of the back country, and the performances revelatory of them.

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<sup>2</sup> Discussed in chapter five.

These performances can be characterized as “the dynamic interplay of individual competence in traditional forms, stylistic resources, and...unique interactional environment[s]” (Briggs, 12). Jim’s underlying focus, as with this work, was to craft a commentary on performances revealing outback competence (or the lack thereof). For Rock Crawlers, this competence entails reading the landscape. Competent readings of the landscape result in the creation of specific cultural zones known as the back country. Back country competence is further manifested, among other things, through the proper construction of one’s rig, and through adherence to rules socially applicable to these zones, like the behavior patterns mandated by the tenets of off-road etiquette.

Competence has been described by folklorist Gerald Pocius as “just knowing what to do and where to do it” (personal communication, 12/11/1997).<sup>3</sup> These understandings are not instinctual, rather, they are learned, and arise through “alliances with other humans...We develop frames of reference within those alliances that determine to a great extent [our] view of the world and often [our] behavior in it” (Stahl, 33). These alliances can be referred to as the folk groups to which we belong. And the referential “frames” are the contexts—physical (location, time) and social (mentally held)—in which a group interacts. An understanding of these contexts is crucial for competent performance because it “underlies [one’s] ability to perform” (Briggs, 2).<sup>4</sup>

Jim’s narrative brings up these issues. First, the driver did not have a socially

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<sup>3</sup> Hymes has noted that competence is “a matter of [knowing] what, where, and when” (and I add how) to do something (19). Briggs, similarly, notes that “competence...underlies the ability to perform” (2).

<sup>4</sup> See also: Briggs, 1-22; Glassie, 1973, 335; Hymes, 13-53; Saville-Trisike, 17-32.

appropriate—and thus, competent—understanding of the Other standing which is expected to comprise the outback experience. Essentially, this “otherness” is characterized by a communal atmosphere which is viewed as an opposite to the normal “look-out for number one” world. This attitude is exemplified through adherence to proper off-road etiquette. The driver disregarded or failed to comprehend these culturally understood “laws” by ignoring spotters, and disregarding the authority of the trail ride’s leader, Jim. Not helping the other participants extricate his rig, and not saying “thank you” formed a bitter icing on the proverbial cake (figs: C.2, C.3).

Jim explicitly noted the driver’s ability to competently construct a vehicle (fig: C.4). Thus, revealing that this individual could understand and perform in one important context: the group-held perception of the terrain’s physical nature, and the tradition arising from the interpretation of this terrain through vehicle re-construction. This ability reveals that the driver had an understanding of—and could draw from—the traditions, resources, and beliefs relevant to the 4x4 “build-up” process. His rig, then, was a competent cultural performance; its form “provided a [cultural] meaning that [was] responsive both to shared beliefs and values and to the [driver’s] own perspective” (Briggs, 18).

Yet, Jim observed that despite the craftsmanship displayed by the vehicle’s form, this individual was not a good driver. In other words, this competent 4x4 construction was not utilized for competent trail performance. That the driver grasped the dynamics involved in constructing an admirable rig, but was not a competent trail ride participant leads to the understanding that all members of a community do not have equal access or competency with all traditions held by the group (Briggs, 8). There are myriad levels of competency and performance in the Rock Crawling community, as with other folk groups.

Through these considerations, an understanding of context and its relationship to belief systems arises. Contexts entail the "cultural scenes" typically thought of as performative conditions (McCarl, 1993, 72). For Rock Crawlers these can be trail rides, instances where friends get together to build their rigs, other such gatherings, or the general vehicle-building milieu. But context entails more than the immediate arena in which an individual performs.<sup>5</sup> It also includes the body of beliefs and traditions giving rise to a given act or creation. That is, beliefs Rock Crawlers hold regarding the locations, characteristics, and benefits of the outback are strong motivational forces that form foundations for other interlocking performative contexts. These other contexts comprise traditions and beliefs regarding such performances as appropriate vehicle fabrication, and appropriate social behavior while taking these 4x4s into the context for which they were built.

Through an understanding of these overlapping and interlocking contexts, a deeper conceptualization of competence within the rock crawling milieu is discovered. Part of this deeper level of competence can be "characterized as responsibility" (Diane Goldstein, personal communication).<sup>6</sup> Responsibility takes several forms, each arising from group-maintained and generated perceptions of the back country. Group-specific outback perceptions generate equally specific traditions regarding what actions "are available in what contexts, and how, where and when they come into play" (Hymes, 20). These various

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<sup>5</sup> Trisike sums-up the works of Hymes by asserting that there are three communicative contexts: *situation*, *event*, and *act* (28).

<sup>6</sup> For the pivotal commentary on how context and performance coalesce to reveal the deeper attitudes which motivate a community, see: Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." See also: Annick Sjogren's "The Ritual of the Meal as A Dynamic Transmitter of Culture."





**FIG: C.2** Participants work together to extricate a broken-down rig from a "hot tub." (Courtesy Jim Broadbent)



**FIG: C.3** People work together to fix a broken rear Land Cruiser axle on the *Rubicon* trail. (Courtesy off-road.com)



**FIG: C.4** Jeff Beach shows what a competently built rig can do by climbing a near-vertical boulder. Notice the wheel travel on the rear axle. (Courtesy Jeff Beach)

responsibilities are related by the common goal to conjure and maintain the existence and continuance of the back country (Hufford, 1992, 7-10). Such efforts occur on multiple levels.

A sense of this group-centered responsibility is evinced through adherence to the tenets of the off-road etiquette. Off-road etiquette is characterized as holding a consideration for others on the trail (including non-Rock Crawlers), and by respecting the outback itself. Most trail ride participants understand that the quality of the ride, in fact the very existence of the conjured outback, tenuously rests upon their respect for the land, and through their ability to place the community first. This means acting as an integral part of the group while within the bounds of the outback. It is the responsibility of each participant to follow these tenets to ensure the continuance of the outback for the group.

Vehicle construction also falls into this dynamic. Yes, the vehicles are built using performance tires, suspensions, gearing combinations, and other fabrication strategies, to "perform" the trails. But a significant portion of these trail performances is a tacit acknowledgement of *Tread Lightly!* concepts. That is, builders construct vehicles that—despite their aggressive appearances—have as little impact upon the land as possible. Once a group has progressed through a trail, it should look the same as before they arrived. As such, "well-structured [4x4s]...serve both the [builder] and [others within the community] as vehicles for expressing and learning [these] values" (Stahl, 20). The vehicles, then, also aid in conjuring and extending the outback during trail rides by symbolizing a respect for the back country environment.

Responsibilities, however, extend well beyond the semiotic messages of the rigs, or

the discrete outback ventures known as trail rides. Rock Crawlers also think about the continuance of their way of life into the distant future. Many worry that their children will not have the same opportunities to experience the outback that they currently enjoy. Therefore, they temper their actions so as to extend the outback into the distant future.

This attitude mandates the continuance of respectful attitudes towards the back country environment. Rock Crawlers realize that many groups do not want them entering these tracts of land with their 4x4s. They also know that these groups wait for motorized trail users to "blaze trails," leave litter behind, or otherwise compromise the quality of the outback, so they can use these instances as fodder for the political machine bent upon closure of these places to all 4x4 use. Consequently, even while not on organized trail rides, most drivers continue to follow the off-road etiquette tenets. These actions result from a sense of responsibility to the rest of the group. Even while not on trails, many Rock Crawlers see themselves as ambassadors for the community. That is, they try to be positive role models in their broader communities to reveal that Rock Crawlers are not the stereotypically degenerate people they believe non-group individuals imagine them to be.

In this light, the context for rock crawling performances extends well beyond trails winding through the back country. It also extends out of the garages and back yards where the vehicles are constructed. The sense of responsibility mandated by these traditions flows into everyday actions in the work arena, school, the grocery store, church, and city streets. These values follow Rock Crawlers everywhere, whether they be in their rigs or not. Competence is thus characterized by one's continual mindfulness of a deep-seated responsibility to the outback and to the group.

This awareness might be a solution to the dilemma created by taking motorized

vehicles into areas deemed by some to be too fragile for motorized transport. The caring and mindfulness generated through outback competence, if practiced equally by all recreational communities, could ease—if not cease—the degradation of these fragile places. Recreationalists could moderate their back country interactions through practices they would be acculturated to view as proper and mandatory. Abusing these places, no matter how minor, would be seen as taboo. It is only through such belief-motivated practices that these places will continue for the lives of the animals and plants existing there, and also for future human enjoyment. If these thought processes do not spread, taking hold universally among recreational communities (and those other communities included within the multiple use category) these special places may vanish forever.

## FINAL WORDS

When considering this research and its conclusions, it is important to keep in mind that I am a Rock Crawler. As a member of this folk group I am a part of both the culture and its attendant politics. This is a boon in that I know many individuals within the community and I am aware of the group centered values motivating their actions. Yet it has been problematic to research and write about my culture while maintaining an ability to remove myself, and my inherited assumptions, from the group's politics. Even my most strident attempts at being detached from these presumptions are still colored by this political baggage. I have attempted to draw this "tint" out of the work by inviting other folklorists—Andrew Bay, Mikel Koven, Michael Robidoux—to view and experience aspects

of rock crawling activities along with myself. Conversations with these scholars about what we observed has helped me to view rock crawling culture from different vantage points. Conversations with thesis readers and editors has also added new and differing perspectives. Of course, these scholars still have limited influence upon the tone and content of the previous pages, which are ultimately the product of my mind. As such, readers must remember that my perspectives concerning rock crawling culture cannot help but flow from a vantage from within the group.

In conclusion, the previous chapters ostensibly cover the traditional *gestalts* of the physical environment which comprise Rock Crawlers' notions of the outback. Discussions have considered the creative and social traditions revealing these beliefs. Yet, a deeper conceptual thread than the topics of the preceding six chapters binds this work together: the traditions each chapter studies mandate actions. Because of their beliefs concerning the character, values, and benefits, associated with the back country, Rock Crawlers' performances, whether self conscious or otherwise, are bound by traditions of appropriateness and responsibility. On an immediate level, this discussion helps readers understand the Rock Crawling community, a frequently misunderstood group. However, I hope readers grasp this work on a broader and more transcendent level. This is that regionally-based<sup>7</sup> communities operate through dynamics arising from within group-centered perceptual canons concerning the environment and locations in which they exist. These traditional environmental notions affect, and are revealed through, the creative and social traditions of all group members.

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<sup>7</sup> I work from the belief that region can apply to an area as diminutive as a neighborhood, or as expansive as the boundaries of a nation.

## GLOSSARY

- Air Compressor:** Many 4x4s now have air compressors installed under their hood so that owners can fill their tires following a trail ride. Some rigs can even run air tools with these compressors. *ARB* "Air Lockers" are activated via air provided by "on-board" compressors.
- Air down:** Off-roaders let the air out of their tires before driving off-road. This not only increases traction but can extend the life of one's tires. With less air, tires are less likely to bounce and skip on sharp rocks. Less air also provides a softer, smoother ride. Most Rock Crawlers air down to: 5-18 lbs. on front tires, and 3-15 lbs. on rear tires. However, some drivers go lower. Samurai owners have been known to drop to 3 lbs. in the front and 1 lb. (or less) in the rear. Tire size, tire construction (bias-ply or radial), and vehicle weight all affect these pressure combinations. More air is almost always used on the front tires to compensate for the engine's weight. (figs: 5.3, 5.4)
- Air Locker:** A *locker* that is actuated via compressed air. This system can be turned on and off. When the unit is off the axle performs like it did in its stock configuration. When the unit is engaged—via a toggle switch within the 4x4—the axle is locked solid, there is no differentiation.
- B.L.M.:** *Bureau of Land Management.* The government agency charged with managing and protecting publicly held lands.
- Body Panel:** The term *body panel* usually refers to the 4x4s fender panels. *Rocker Panels* (rockers) are also occasionally referred to in this way.
- Bottom Out:** (1)When a vehicle scrapes its undercarriage on trail obstacles.  
(2) When a vehicle's suspension fully compresses, resulting in full contact with the bump-stops or the shock absorbers. Usually the 4x4 will "heave" up and down violently in such instances.

Bullet Proof:	A part (or 4x4) that is built so strongly or so well that it will not break while off-road. People now also say "Bomb proof."
Chicken Route:	A trail spur that circumvents a difficult obstacle. There is no shame in using a chicken route because even the best drivers occasionally have bad days.
Clearance:	The amount of unobstructed space under a vehicle. High clearance is necessary to avoid scraping obstacles.
Daily Driver:	A rig that is also a primary source of transportation in the work-a-day world.
Dana 44:	Axles used on Chevy, Dodge, and Ford ½ ton and light-duty ¾ ton trucks. Usually they come from the factory as front axles. Jeep is currently using these on the rear of their Grand Cherokees and TJ Wranglers. This addition to the Jeeps is due to input into design from the Rock Crawling community. Many Rock Crawlers replace stock axles—front and/or rear—with the Dana 44. It is perhaps the most versatile and widely used replacement axle.
Dana 60:	A heavy duty axle utilized by Chevy, Dodge, and Ford on ¾ and one-ton trucks. (They occasionally appear on old model Jeep pick-up trucks.) This is one of the most indestructible—or bullet-proof—axes made. This axle is currently becoming more widely used to replace less beefy stock axles on many rock crawlers. While not used as extensively as the <i>Dana 44</i> , it is gaining popularity.
Detroit:	Shortened form for <i>Detroit Locker</i> .
Detroit Locker:	Another name for the "No Slip" differential. This traction-aiding device (or <i>Locker</i> ) provides full-power to both wheels on an axle. (Factory differentials provide power to only one axle.) This locker is automatic, that is, it works continuously.
Drive Shaft:	As part of the drive train, they extend from the transfer case, to the front and rear axles, carrying power from the engine. (fig: 4.7)
Fiberglass Body:	A replacement vehicle body that is constructed of resilient and rust-impervious fiberglass. They are also considerably lighter than the factory steel units.



**Fin:** Tall and narrow sandstone formations common to southern Utah desertescapes. They literally resemble a shark or dolphin fin which seems to protrude from the desert floor. Some of these can actually be traversed in a vehicle. (fig: G.1)

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**FIG: G.1** Sandstone fins heave from the desert floor.

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- Firewall:** The section of a vehicle's body which separates the engine compartment from the interior (passenger compartment) of the vehicle.
- G.P.S.:** *Global Positioning System.* Using at least three orbiting satellites to triangulate position, these units can instantly locate a driver anywhere on Earth to within 50 feet.
- Grenade:** The catastrophic failure of a costly or important part; see also: *Scatter.*
- High Center:** Refers to a vehicle's undercarriage becoming lodged on an obstacle. When this occurs at least one tire becomes air-borne or loses traction. In many instances two or more tires will lose contact with the trail. To dislodge the rig people must push, winch, use a jack or trail debris to lift it off the obstacle.

- High-Lift Jack:** A special extended jack for off-road use. These are very tall, more than 4 feet, for "lifted" vehicles with tall tires. Uneven terrain also necessitates jacks that are bigger than factory.
- Hold-Back:** The ability for gearing and engine compression to slow a vehicle rather than the brakes.
- Hubs:** These are the actuators at the ends of the front axle that engage the axle for 4-wheel drive use. Most are engaged with a simple twist of the hand. (fig: G.2)
- Line:** The specific paths taken over the terrain. Ideal lines are those bringing one's vehicle into harmony with the terrain's irregularities, rather than continuously fighting against them.
- Locked-Up:** Any vehicle having at least one *Locker*. Vehicles can be referred to as "locked up front and rear," specifically meaning that both axles have lockers.
- Locker:** Traction aiding devices that replace the stock differential and provide equal power to each wheel on an axle. These are a must, not an option, for driving on many tough trails. Some lockers, like *Detroit Lockers* and *Lock-Rights*, work continuously. Other units, like the *ARB "Air Locker"* can be turned on and off.
- Lock Hubs:** To manually engage one's front axle for 4-wheel drive use. Most vehicles must be engaged manually with twist knobs at the axle ends. Some newer vehicles have systems that can be actuated electronically from inside the vehicle—but these are not usually strong or reliable enough for heavy usage. Axles that do not have hubs are usually discarded for ones that do. (fig: G.2)
- Lock-Right Locker:** This locking differential operates similar to the *Detroit Locker*. Like other locking differentials, it divides power evenly between the two wheels on the axle in which it is installed. Although not as tough as the *Detroit*, it has nevertheless been proven reliable on outback trails.
- Nerf Bars:** Tubular bars that extend out from the vehicle frame between the wheels and under the doors. These protect *Rocker Panels* from obstacles along the trail. (figs: 4.14, 4.20, 5.15, 6.18)



**FIG: G.2** On this Jeep's front axle the hub extends from the axle-end through the center of the wheel.

- Nine Inch:** Shortened form for Ford's *Nine Inch Axle*. A heavy duty rear axle used on Ford  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton trucks and sport utility vehicles. Their "modular" design makes them easy to work on and modify. Rock Crawlers now alter these units for use as front axles. The Nine Inch is widely respected as one of the toughest axles available.
- Overdrive:** Overdrive units, such as the *Ranger*, work much like a *Torque Splitter*. But instead of lowering gearing, overdrives raise it.
- Overhang:** The amount of vehicle extending past the front or rear wheels. The less vehicle extending, the better the approach or departure angle. (fig: 4.15)
- Posi-Traction:** Chevrolet's name for their limited slip differential configuration. Most Rock Crawlers, however, call all limited slip units Posi-Traction (or Posis for short). Unlike lockers, limited slips proportion power to the wheels on an axle. For instance, where a locker would provide full power to the two wheels on an axle, a limited slip might provide 60/40, 70/30, or even 80/20. Limited slips' proportioning ability puts less stress on axles than lockers. Although this configuration often works

better on the street than many lockers, the proportioning effect provides greater power to air-bound tires than those on the ground. Also, limited slips are driven by clutches rather than gears, this means they routinely wear out where lockers do not.

- Reverse Cut:** Reverse cut axles are units that have been turned upside down so that the drive line enters them from the top rather than the bottom. To work properly, the axles must have gears that are cut backwards. This "reverse cut" allows the 4x4 to go forward, rather than backwards, when the driver wants to go forward. Reverse cut axles provide two benefits: (1) raise drive lines higher from the ground (2) ease acute drive line angles. (fig: 3.9)
- Rocker Panel:** The *Body Panel* under the vehicle doors spanning the distance between front and rear tires.
- Sand-Hill Climber:** Special 4x4s built for climbing steep sand dunes or hills at extreme speeds. Often these rigs are built for racing. A specific community centers around this form of off-roading.
- Scatter:** Known also as "grenading." This means to shatter or break something on a rig. Under rugged conditions when some parts (hubs, axle shafts, differentials) break, they do literally fly apart as if they have exploded.
- Slick Rock:** The name given to the smooth orange, red, beige, and yellow sandstone of the southern Utah desert. Despite what its name seems to imply, this stone gives better traction than the pavement on city streets. It is rumoured that slick rock got its name from cowboys. When they attempted to ride their horses over it, the steel horseshoes could not get traction on the smooth stone—hence the name. (figs: 2.5, 3.13, 6.17)
- Spotter:** Those individuals standing at the trail's edge who guide drivers through difficult obstacles. These individuals are usually the trail leader, well known drivers, or trusted friends of the driver attempting the obstacle. Spotters use hand signals and vocal commands to guide drivers.
- Suspension Lift:** Known as "lift kits," these are used to raise the height of a vehicle. Softer, flexier, springs are regularly used so as to improve off-road performance.

Sway Bar Disconnects:	Rigid rods that attach from a vehicle's frame to its axle and/or suspension componentry. The purpose of a sway bar is to limit body-roll, or the body swaying, as the vehicle corners. Sway bars work well for the street, but they hamper wheel travel because they work by fighting suspension movement. Restricted suspension travel is an undesirable trait off-road. Some Rock Crawlers take their sway bars off and suffer with lack-luster road performance. Others use "quick disconnects" which allow the sway bars to be unhooked for enhanced off-road performance, and re-attached for excellent street performance: they provide the best of both worlds. (fig: 5.23)
Torque splitter:	A device installed between the engine and transmission or transmission and transfer case. These devices provide additional gearing for one's vehicle. Some units offer the possibility of an additional 30% gear reduction below that offered by factory gearing. Torque splitters also offer a greater range of gear choices. Some vehicles with torque splitters boast 16 forward gears and 4 reverse gear combinations.
Tie-Rod Ends:	The linkages that hold all the steering in unison. Tie-rod ends are the links that connect tie rods to each other.
Transfer Case:	The "t-case" sits behind the transmission and is responsible for routing outgoing power to the front and rear axles. Most t-cases have 4-high, which does not change the gear ratio, and 4-wheel low, which significantly reduces the gear ratio to the axles. (fig: 4.7)
U-Bolts & Mounts:	U-bolts hold the spring to the axle. They are "U" shaped and extend from the mount, that seats the spring, around the axle and back to the mount on the other side of the spring.
Wheel Travel:	The cycling ability of a suspension. A suspension that only provides 4 inches up and down tire movement does not have as much travel as one that allows a tire to move 15 inches. (figs: 1.25, 3.6, 3.7, 4.36, 5.21)
Winch:	Powered electrically, hydraulically, or by power take-offs from the transmission or transfer case, these units are used to pull vehicles from dangerous or stuck positions off-road. They can be mounted on the front or rear of a vehicle. (figs: 3.5, 4.37)

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